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ABSTRACT

A step-by-step primer is presented that introduces the reader to ethnography and its practical applications, then guides the reader through each stage of the ethnographic inquiry process (initial steps, observation, interviews, data analysis, leaving the site, and reporting the findings). The concrete guidelines and suggestions help the reader understand how to build a personal and/or organizational capability for doing practical fieldwork from an ethnographic perspective. (PN)

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METHODOLOGY PROJECT DELIVERABLE

An Introduction To: PRACTICAL FIELDWORK FROM AN ETHNOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE

Donald W. Dorr-Bremme

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Introduction

Ethnography, the field research method long associated with anthropology, has recently claimed attention and interest throughout the social science research community. Its utility for "getting inside" and illuminating the complex dynamics of educational and other social service delivery programs has come to be widely recognized. Ethnography and naturalistic methods derived from it have won a place in the fields of evaluation and policy study. Ethnographic inquiry has been increasingly recommended as a way of gaining a greater understanding of schooling and classroom life, medical training and practice, public negotiation and conflict resolution, cross-cultural communication, and organizational behavior. Growing numbers of school districts, medical facilities, and other institutions and agencies have begun to undertake applied ethnographic studies. In short, throughout the last half dozen years ethnography has assumed an increasingly important place in the social science research repertoire.

This booklet is for those who need and want to know more about this vital and practical approach to understanding human social activity. It is a step-by-step "primer" that introduces the reader to ethnography and its practical applications, then guides him or her through each stage of the ethnographic inquiry process. The concrete guidelines and suggestions that are presented throughout will help the reader understand both (1) how to build a personal and/or organizational capability for doing practical fieldwork from an ethnographic perspective, and (2) how to do this kind of fieldwork well.

Chapter 1 introduces ethnography and explains how it is similar to and different than other modes of social science inquiry. Practical uses of ethnography, and some of the costs associated with its use, are discussed in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 offers advice on how to get help with ethnography. It includes suggestions for how to locate and select an accomplished ethnographer to conduct inquiry or provide training in fieldwork, as well as recommendations for building an effective training program.

Chapters 4 and 5 outline the foundations of ethnographic inquiry. They provide an overview of the ethnographic orientation -- the frame of reference that guides how the ethnographer thinks about and examines human social activity -- and some general principles of ethnographic inquiry design that follow from this orientation. The remaining chapters of the book take the reader through each step or phase in the ethnographic inquiry cycle. In each of these chapters, directions and tips are offered that can help assure high-quality inquiry.

Both ethnographer instructors and fieldwork trainees will find the simple, step-by-step approach and practical suggestions of this booklet a useful supplement to other, more technical methods texts. The booklet can also serve in itself as a training manual -- and as a basic handbook to which trainees can return regularly for guidance once they begin fieldwork on their own.

Researchers trained in experimental and other "quantitative" modes of inquiry will find that the booklet provides a solid introduction to the ethnographic method.

Organizational administrators and program managers will find information here that can help them decide whether to invest in ethnography and/or training in ethnographic fieldwork for their staff members. The step-by-step suggestions for doing fieldwork will help them both to participate in planning fieldwork and to monitor ethnographic studies in an informed way.

Reading these pages, in itself, will not make one an ethnographer. No one volume can hope to address all the issues entailed in fieldwork; none can replace the field experience which is essential in the making of an ethnographer. Here, technical issues of an advanced methodological kind have been purposely omitted. The basics of ethnographic fieldwork are given center stage in a way that makes them accessible to the neophyte. And throughout, emphasis is placed on doing fieldwork for practical purposes in educational and other social service agencies.

PART 1

AN OVERVIEW OF ETHNOGRAPHY AND ITS PRACTICAL USES

CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS ETHNOGRAPHY?

What is ethnography? How is it like and unlike other ways of gathering and reporting information? How is it done and why is it done that way? This chapter gives you some general answers to these very basic questions. It provides an introductory overview of ethnography upon which the rest of this booklet will elaborate.

Two Meanings of the Word Ethnography

Let's begin by looking briefly at the word itself. Ethnography has two meanings, both of which will concern you and I in this booklet. One meaning is captured by the literal meaning of the word, "writing about the people": -graphy from the Greek verb "to write" and ethno- from the Greek noun ethnos, usually translated as "tribe," "nation," or "people." In this first sense, ethnography refers to a written account of how members of a social group live their lives --one which usually focuses upon the group's culture. The kind of "writing about the people" that appears in an ethnography has traditionally been done by anthropologists. The people they have written about have most often been cultural groups in "third world" locales. Some classic ethnographies, for example, have described ways of life among Samoan and Mexican villagers, Trobriand Islanders and Pueblo Indians, and various African tribal societies. But for some time anthropologists have also examined and written ethnographies of social life and culture in urban-industrial settings --in hospitals, factories, and schools, for instance.

This meaning of ethnography is of minor importance in the pages that follow. Chances are that it will never be appropriate for you or

those you employ to write the kind of comprehensive, highly detailed description of group life that constitutes a full-fledged ethnography. (To date, evaluators have had occasion to do so only rarely.) Nevertheless, it is important for you to understand and be able to identify the qualities of good ethnographic writing. Such writing should be the core of any report of findings from an evaluation that follows an ethnographic approach. I'll explain the major characteristics and rationale of effective ethnographic reporting toward the end of the booklet.

Used in a second and equally appropriate way, ethnography refers to the field research method of anthropologists and some sociologists. It is a way of studying aspects of a group's culture or social life in naturally occuring circumstances. More specifically, ethnography is a systematic mode of inquiry which is especially strong for explaining the "how" of group life: How is the life of this particular group of people organized? How do they do what they regularly do? How does the state of social affairs that I find here come to be as it is? It is to address these fundamental questions that the ethnographic method has evolved in anthropology, and it is to address similar questions that ethnography can be useful in evaluation. Thus, it is in this second sense --as referring to an inquiry method-- that the term ethnography has found its way into the vocabulary of evaluation. And it is in this sense that I will use the term throughout this book.

Now, let's examine ethnography in comparison to other ways of conducting inquiry and see what kind of a method it is.

Ethnography: A Naturalistic Method

Those in educational research and evaluation frequently divide approaches to inquiry into two general types. One of these includes

experimental research and other modes of inquiry based upon the experimental model (quasi-experimental and correlational studies, for example). Collectively, the latter are usually associated with such terms as quantitative research, scientific research, hard data, variables, hypothesis-testing, psychometric, and statistical. The second, contrastive type includes inquiry that is conducted by going into the field, interviewing people and/or observing them as they engage in their regular activities, taking notes on what they say and do, and reporting findings in narrative form. This kind of work is commonly associated with such labels and phrases as qualitative research, naturalistic inquiry, ethnography, fieldwork, case study, soft data, ecological, descriptive, and interpretive (c.f., Bogdan and Biklen, 1982). A great many difficulties arise when one tries to classify all inquiry on human activity as one of two types, "quantitative" or "qualitative." (Where do we place natural experiments? What about ethnographic studies that use statistics in reporting results?) Nevertheless, this dichotomy is a common and familiar way of mapping research approaches; and if one uses it, ethnography falls in the qualitative or naturalistic domain.

Ethnography and naturalistic or qualitative inquiry, however, are not one and the same. Used appropriately, naturalistic and qualitative are generic labels; they demarcate a general approach to inquiry. The first term emphasizes that in this approach human activity is studied in its naturally occurring circumstances; the second, that this approach is interested in the qualities (or natures) of things to people in the group under study. Despite these different emphases, the two labels are most often used in everday talk as synonyms: they refer to the same general research approach.

Ethnography is one specific kind of naturalistic or qualitative inquiry method.* As such, it has a number of characteristics in common with other naturalistic/qualitative modes of inquiry. These differentiate it (and other naturalistic/qualitative modes) from the so-called quantitative approaches. We'll examine these characteristics next. As we do, you'll gain a fuller understanding of what ethnography is and how it is done.

First, while quantitative modes of inquiry are usually based in a logical positivist view of the world, ethnography (with other naturalistic/qualitative modes) proceeds from a phenomenological perspective. These two orientations to the world, and the main difference between them, are well explained in the following quotation:

> Two major theoretical perspectives have dominated the social science scene. One, positivism, traces its origins to the great social theorists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and especially to Auguste Comte and Emile Durkheim. The positivist seeks the facts or causes of social phenomena with little regard for the subjective states of individuals. Durkheim advised the social scientist to consider "social facts," or social phenomena, as "things" that exercise an external and coercive force on human behavior.
>
> The second theoretical perspective, which, following the lead of Irwin Deutscher, we will describe as phenomenological, stems most prominently from Max Weber. The phenomenologist is concerned with understanding human behavior from the actor's own frame of reference....The phenomenologist examines how the world is experienced. For him or her the important reality is what people imagine it to be.

* Others ways of doing research that probably qualify as naturalistic or qualitative are ethology (the observational study of species in their natural habitats), clinical interviewing as conducted in the course of psychotherapy, focus-group interviewing as conducted in the course of market research, and investigative journalism. Of these, the first is clearly naturalistic in that it studies animal life in naturally occurring circumstances. The others are "qualitative" in the sense that they endeavor to get at the qualities of things from the points of view of informants.

> Since the positivists and the phenomenologists approach different problems and seek different answers, their research will typically demand different methodologies (Bogdan and Taylor, 1975:2, italics in the original).

As logical positivists, quantitative researchers routinely base their inquiry upon the assumption that "things" in the social world --things like statuses, roles, social classes, ideas and beliefs-- are objective facts; they have an existence and/or power independent of whoever is looking at the world. The categories of people, objects, actions, institutions, social situations, and so on that "really" exist are "out there" in the world for anyone to ascertain. What particular forms of behavior and action mean are treated as equally apparent. From this perspective, then, the researcher assumes that he or she can learn what is true about, and how things work in, society by using the appropriate scientific measurement techniques, just as a chemist or physicist can in studying the physical universe.

Ethnographers takes a very different point of view. As phenomenologists, they assume that perspectives on the nature of reality and meaning can vary systematically from one society to another. Different societies and even groups with a society can and very often do see the social and physical worlds in very different ways. Particular phenomena (kinds of people, human actions, objects, etc.) can have very different meanings for members of different social groups. Thus, from the ethnographer's viewpoint, what is real and true is very much a matter of social perception and interpretation. Furthermore, ethnographers point out, the actions that people regularly take in their daily lives are based upon their interpretations of how things are, regardless of what may be verifiably "true" or "factual" according to "scientific" measures. It follows that ethnographers strive, first and foremost, to understand

reality and meaning as they exist for the group under study and then to explain that group's social activities in light of the ways that they see and interpret the world. Indeed, "for ethnographic inquiry, validity is commonly dependent on an accurate knowledge of the meanings of behaviors and institutions to those who participate in them" (Hymes, 1982:25).

I will have more to say about the ethnographic orientation to social life, reality, and meaning further on; for learning to do practical fieldwork from an ethnographic perspective means in large part learning to think, question, and see as ethnographers do. Here, however, it is simply important to see that this phenomenonlogical orientation is the philosophical foundation of the ethnographic and other naturalistic/qualitative modes of inquiry. It is in order to understand reality, meaning, and social life from the viewpoint of those being studied that ethnographers conduct their studies as they do.

If one is going to understand and explain social activity from the point of view of participants' reality, then one must enter, observe, and experience their world. Thus, a second essential feature of ethnography (and naturalistic/qualitative inquiry in general) is, as I noted earlier, the study of social phenomena in their naturally occuring contexts. Guba and Lincoln (1981:78-80) note that while the experimental researcher endeavors to constrain and control certain "antecedent variables" and possible "outputs," allowing only selected behaviors to vary in experimentally salient ways, the naturalist strives to minimize the extent to which both antecedent conditions and behavioral outputs are influenced by the research act. According to Guba (1978:13), then:

> [Any] naturalistic investigator...begins as an anthropologist might begin learning about a strange culture, by immersing himself in the investigation with as open a mind as possible, and permitting impressions to emerge...Essentially the naturalistic inquirer's model is ethnography.

As this should suggest, ethnography (and naturalistic/qualitative inquiry generally) is holistic. Indeed, a widely read text on ethnographic methods makes the point that "one of the most pervasive features of anthropological culture is the general commitment to holism" (Pelto and Pelto, 1978:286). This means that ethnographers and other naturalists strive to describe and explain phenomena --situations, events, programs-- as wholes, paying attention to the contexts in which activities occur. As Patton (1980:40) puts it:

> In contrast to experimental designs which manipulate and measure the relationships among a few carefully selected and narrowly defined variables, the holistic approach to research design is open to gathering data on any number of aspects of the setting under study in order to put together a complete picture of the social dynamic of a particular situation or program.

Ethnography and allied naturalistic/qualitative inquiry modes are also inductive in approach. Ethnographic fieldwork does not proceed from a small set of pre-specified variables and a proposition about their relationships, i.e., an hypothesis or a conceptual framework. Rather, naturalistic/qualitative inquiry proceeds from some broad general questions which are refined and increasingly specified as the researcher observes and interacts with persons in the setting under study. At the same time, key dimensions along which the data will be analyzed emerge as the case or cases under study are examined.

But while ethnographic inquiry is inductive in its overall design, it and other naturalistic/qualitative approaches include both expansionist (or divergent) and reductionist (or convergent) phases (c.f., Guba, 1978:7). That is, there are moments during an ethnographic study when the investigator is broadening the inquiry with new or re-formulated questions and hunches based upon data he/she has already collected and moments when the investigator is focusing the inquiry in order to answer these questions and/or to confirm or disconfirm these hunches. Thus,

> For many ethnographers, it is of the essence of the method that it is a dialectical, or feedback (or interactive-adaptive) method. It is of the essence of the method that initial questions may change during the course of inquiry...an essential characteristic of ethnography is that it is open-ended, subject to self-correction during the process of inquiry itself (Hymes, 1982:24).

Another implication of ethnography's inductive and interactive-adaptive approach is that:

> Categories imported to the setting from the outside are avoided. Instead, the goal of ethnographic research is to allow the reality of the situation to impinge on the investigator's subjectivity until the categories for description are determined by the scene itself (Mehan, 1982:62).

It follows from all the above that the researcher him- or herself is the primary instrument of data collection in ethnographic inquiry. (The researcher's person is usually a very central instrument in other naturalistic/qualitative approaches, too.) It is as the ethnographer participates in the setting under study, observing and experiencing daily life comprehensively, that he or she arrives inductively at a holistic understanding and portrayal of the social phenomena of interest. This, of course, suggests a very different role than the one that quantitative

researchers usually play. In experimental and quasi-experimental studies, the researcher tries to minimize or standardize his or her interaction with the subjects. Mechanical and/or paper-and-pencil instruments pre-structure data collection.

To summarize, ethnography is one type of naturalistic or qualitative inquiry. With other naturalistic/qualitative inquiry modes, ethnography is oriented by the phenomenological perspective. Thus, ethnography entails the holistic, inductive (or dialectical, or responsive-adaptive) study of phenomena in their naturally occurring contexts. It places emphasis upon the investigator as the primary instrument of data collection, immersing him- or herself in the setting under study and attending to social realities as they are understood and experienced by participants in that setting.

Ethnographic Fieldwork In Overview

What does an ethnographer literally do to study naturally occurring social activity in a holistic, inductive, responsive-adaptive way, using his or her entire person as a data collection instrument? Most of this booklet answers this question by providing guidelines for each step in the ethnographic inquiry process. But as you read these separate sections, it will be helpful for you to have the following overview of ethnographic fieldwork in mind. In addition, this summary description will round out my general, introductory answer to the question that heads this chapter, "What is ethnography?"

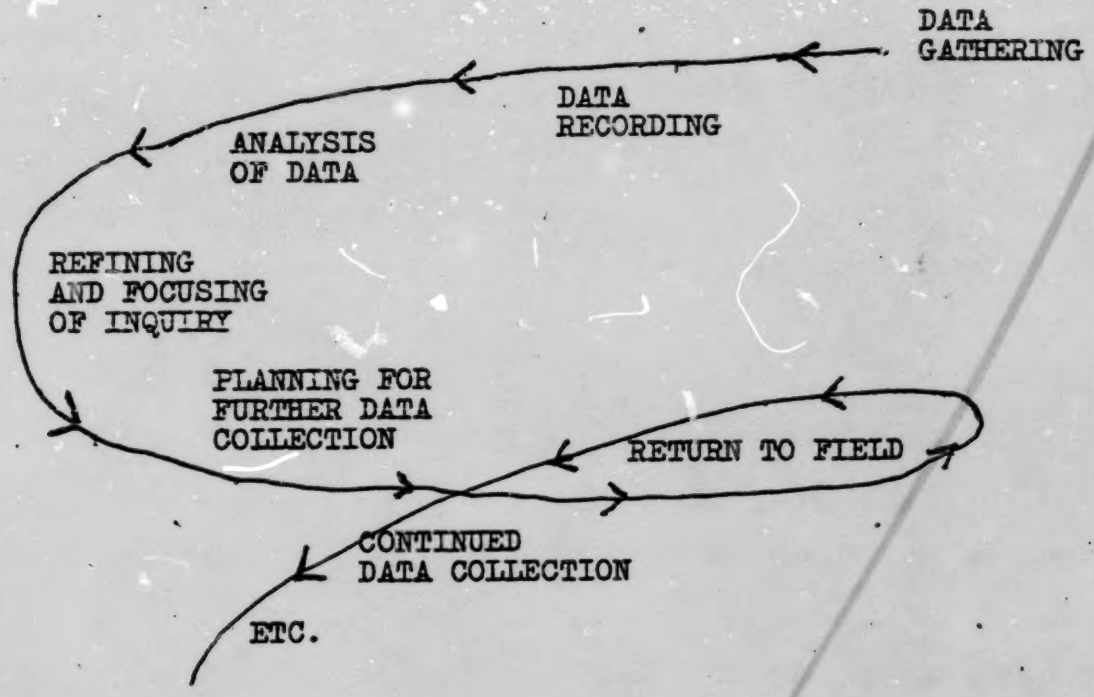
An ethnographer begins the inquiry process with a few, very broad questions. In the context of research, these are typically the "How?" questions I mentioned earlier: How is the life (or this particular aspect of the life) of this group of people organized? How does the state of

social affairs that I see here come to be as it is? In the context of an evaluation, the ethnographer prefaces these questions with another one: What is going on here that seemed to be occasioned by, enacted in the name of, and functionally relevant to the program (or other endeavor) at issue? (Once the ethnographic evaluator has identified the set of activities that answer this question, he/she can go on to pose the "how" questions about them.) Some other, only slightly more specific questions, are usually framed in light of the particular phenomena being studied.
In an evaluation, these questions will also reflect the evaluation's intended purposes and/or the concerns and interests of various evaluation audiences.

Having established these initial questions, the ethnographer begins a cycle of inquiry steps that include (1) gathering data on site, (2) analyzing and reflecting on the data, (3) refining and posing new (usually more specific) questions to guide continuing inquiry, and (4) returning to the study site(s) for further data collection. In this cycle, hunches or rough hypotheses are successively generated, examined in view of the increasing data, and validated or reshaped or disconfirmed as still more data are gathered. (See Figure 1. below.)

Figure 1.

The Cycle of Ethnographic Fieldwork



Nearly anything the ethnographer notices or experiences on site can become data. He or she observes and listens to what participants in the setting under study do and say as they carry out their everyday lives, paying careful attention to when and where they do and say it. Planned interviews and impromptu conversations with participants also serve as important sources of information. Often, formal and informal documents and records are read and analyzed. When details of fine-grained behaviors are essential to the study, ethnographers make videotapes or audiotapes of participants' interaction.

In narrative field notes, the ethnographer records what participants say as fully and as literally as possible--ideally, as they are doing and saying it. He or she also records personal impressions and interpretations, carefully keeping these separate from the record of participants' words and deeds. At the end of a day on site, the ethnographer fills in his/her field notes, adding details that were omitted in the press of events on site. Then, the ethnographer examines the notes written so far in order to identify emerging themes and patterns: actions and action sequences, expressed ideas and feelings, terms and phrases for labeling and classifying things, etc., that seem to recur through the notes and fit together. In reviewing his or her notes, the ethnographer also looks for apparent contradictions or discrepancies that should be clarified, pinpoints topics on which information seems incomplete, and tries to monitor how his or her preconceptions or biases may be influencing the accumulating record and/or emerging interpretation.

As the ethnographer reflects on his or her field notes toward these ends, hunches and further questions suggest themselves. These serve to direct and focus on-going inquiry when the ethnographer returns to the field. And as the ethnographer repeats these steps and gathers additional and more detailed information, tentative hunches evolve into firmer hypotheses and, with still further inquiry, into findings.

The cycle continues, within the limits of available resources, until the ethnographer finds that a point of closure on the central questions of the study has been reached. The social life of any group is rich and complex, and inquiry could very well continue. But at some point the answers to the basic questions of the study seem adequate and there is sufficient evidence to support them. New questions have begun to arise

with markedly decreasing frequency, or (more often) the questions that have begun to suggest themselves seem to open the door to entirely new and substantially different studies.

Now, the ethnographer must take time to comprehensively review and re-think the body of field notes and related data, check again for patterns that he or she may have overlooked while in the field, and draw together the evidence that supports the generalizations and explanations embodied in the patterns. In writing up an account of the organized social life that he or she has witnessed and experienced in the course of inquiry, the ethnographer attends carefully to language choices, as well as to the representativeness and importance of quotations and illustrative instances of activity. And primarily, he or she works to be sure that the fabric of the description explicates the functional relevance that participants' various ways of acting, thinking, believing, and judging have for one another.

This chapter has introduced you to ethnography as an inquiry process conducted from a phenomenological perspective. The next will address some practical questions about the ways you can use ethnographic inquiry.

CHAPTER 2

USING ETHNOGRAPHY

Even the relatively brief and basic explanation of ethnography in the preceding pages is enough to permit discussion of some practical questions. What practical purposes can ethnography serve? When and why would I choose to use it? How much does it cost? If these questions have not already occurred to you, they are very likely to as you read this booklet. I address each as fully as I can in this chapter.

Ethnography And Evaluation

One of the most practical uses of ethnography --and the one I will focus on throughout-- is in conducting evaluation inquiry. Notice that I have said evaluation inquiry. Evaluation can be considered as including both (1) some means of gathering information on the program, innovation, set of operations, etc., to be evaluated; and (2) some set of procedures and/or criteria for assigning value or values to that program, innovation, or what have you. Ethnography in itself entails no particular framework or criteria for reaching conclusions about the goodness or badness, strengths or weaknesses, merit or worth of any social endeavor. It is a method for gathering data, for coming to an understanding and explanation of how a program or some other body of social activity works as it does.

Ethnography and the kind of information that it provides can be of some use in nearly any evaluation, but ethnographic inquiry and findings are more compatible with and useful in some kinds of evaluation than

others. To understand which, let's look again for a moment at the general kinds of inquiry problems and questions that ethnography is usually used to address, then see how these apply in evaluation.

As I noted in the last chapter, the ethnographic mode of inquiry follows from the ethnographer's question "How?" and from the phenomenological perspective. The ethnographer's inquiry goal is "to specify the machinery that generates the social order observed as people organize their lives together, with the additional proviso that the description be meaningful in participants' terms" (Mehan: 1982:60) Thus, ethnography is appropriate for addressing certain questions --What is going on here? How is it organized: what social and cultural organizing principles ("rules" or "grammars") are in use here? How can we account for or explain this state of affairs? --and for providing answers to these questions in terms of participants' ways of seeing their world and acting in it. Translated to fit the typical concerns of evaluation, these questions become the following:

> (1) What is going on here that seems to be enacted in the name of or occasioned by --and also functionally relevant to --the program at issue?
>
> (2) How, in terms of participants' social realities, are these social activities organized? That is, what systems of socially shared perceptions, belief, knowledge, and action are participants using in order to perform program-related activities as they routinely do?
>
> (3) How can we explain this body of activity and its organization in terms of participants' social realities, i.e., in terms of what we know about the ways in which participants systematically perceive, believe, evaluate, and choose actions?

These ethnographic evaluation questions logically lead one to a detailed study of the social processes constituting programs, innovations,

or routine organizational operations. Information on processes or dynamics is especially relevant in several kinds of evaluation, and these are the kinds of evaluation in which ethnographic inquiry can serve best. They are listed and briefly explained below.

Formative evaluation. Evaluation that is "formative" has the goal of refining and improving the organization, management, services, etc., of a program or other social endeavor. (This contrasts with the purposes of a "summative evaluation," which are generally to help make a judgment on the overall worth of a program toward determining whether it should be continued or discontinued.) Formative evaluations are usually undertaken during the stage of program development, e.g., during piloting, demonstration, etc. Their primary audiences, then, are program developers and institutional administrators and members of their staffs in organizations that might adopt the program in question. In a formatve evaluation, the former usually want to know: How well are the various aspects of our program working now? What are their strengths and weaknesses? Can they be revised in ways that will make them work better and, if so, how? Those who are considering funding or adopting the program can use formative evaluation information to help them understand what the program is like and whether it is worth supporting, recommending, or using.

Implementation evaluation. Implementation evaluations focus on how planned programs are actually put into operation at local sites. There are several reasons for undertaking an evaluation of a program's implementation. Down the line, it may be necessary to measure program effects across the many program sites. Before this can be done, however,

it is necessary to ascertain whether the program as defined on paper is actually enacted in the same ways from one site to another. (Attempts at standardized measurement of outcomes will be inappropriate and fruitless if it is not.) Alternatively, program designers or managers may want to be sure that certain key features of their program are carefully followed in local settings. If there have been departures from these features, they want to know this and, in order to take appropriate action, learn why they have occurred. In many situations, local adaptations of standard program goals and processes may be improvements. Toward sharing information on these with program participants in similar settings or toward altering general program guidelines to incorporate these local adaptations as options, central program administrators may wish to identify them and understand how they increase program success under particular circumstances.

According to evaluation methodologist Michael Patton (1980:69):

> Implementation evaluations answer the following kinds of questions: What do clients in the program experience? What do staff do? What is it like to be in the program? How is the program organized? Implementation evaluations tell decision makers what is going on in the program and how the program is organized.

Process evaluation. As the name implies, evaluations of this type focus on program or organizational dynamics. Process evaluations may be undertaken to identify strengths and weaknesses toward improvement, as in formative evaluation. They can also be done in an attempt to isolate key elements that make for program or organizational success (overall or in particular localities) or in order to understand why a program or set of operations seems to work well in some types of settings but not in others.

As Patton (1980:61) points out, a naturalistic or qualitative approach is particularly apt in a process evaluation because "the nature of program processes is sufficiently complex and interdependent that they are seldom easily represented along some set of unidimensional quantitative scales."

Supplementing quantitative evaluation methods. In many instances the scope of a program, audience requirements for statistical generalizability, and dollars available for the evaluation interact in a way that makes a "quantitative" strategy the most reasonable mode of evaluation inquiry. At the same time, the evaluation's sponsors and/or audiences may need detailed information about program implementation or other processes to inform the decisions they must make. Ethnography can serve in these circumstances as a useful supplement to quantitative inquiry. As quantitative data are collected, case studies can be conducted at a few of the many program sites using ethnographic inquiry. These can provide an in-depth look at program dynamics that are only hinted at in data from surveys, test-score analyses, etc. Ethnographic inquiry can also be phased such that it follows and elucidates the findings of quantitative studies. The advantages of ethnography for these evaluation purposes are several. Ethnography, as I have already noted, provides richly detailed description and holistic explication of program processes and outcomes as they occur amidst the complexity of the "real world." The holistic, inductive, and responsive-adaptive approach of ethnographic inquiry allows it to identify influences on the program and program effects that are often missed in evaluations oriented by experimental and psychometric premises. Furthermore, as a mode of inquiry grounded in a long tradition of anthropological and sociological theory and research findings, and with a long history of methodological development in those fields, ethnography is

a sounder and more rigorous method for doing the things I have just mentioned than other naturalistic/qualitative approaches as they are usually described by evaluation methodologists. Finally, since ethnography portrays program processes and effects and their contextual influences in terms consonant with program participants' ways of experiencing reality, it enables program managers and sponsors to act on evaluation information in ways that take into account and respond to the needs, concerns, and viewpoints of participants in local settings. Thus, the decisions and actions --the mandates and guidelines, recommendations and resources, management processes and technical assistance services, etc.-- based on an ethnographic evaluation can be more practical, sensible, and meaningful from the points of view of those who must enact them or act within them. This, in turn, can increase the chances that the program will be carried out in local settings more enthusiastically and in ways more similar to sponsors' or administrators' intents. In short, ethnographic findings can facilitate the process of mutual adaptation of the program to local needs and circumstances, on the one hand, and of local goals and processes to the those of the larger program's, on the other. There is good evidence that this kind of mutual adaptation leads to successful program implementation (McLaughlin, 1976).

Given its phenomenological philosophic stance and its central concern with social processes, ethnography tends to be (as I suggested earlier) more consonant with some evaluation models than others. It is extremely difficult to conduct ethnography in a truly ethnographic way in the context of an evaluation narrowly directed at measuring the extent to which program objectives have or have not been achieved (e.g., Tyler, 1949).

immediately confining inquiry in this way conflicts with the holistic, responsive-adaptive method which is the essence of ethnography. It also makes an irrelevant analysis of how the program operates in terms of participants' realities. Ethnography, then, is much more compatible with the "goal-free" orientation to evaluation described by Scriven (1972), in which the evaluator looks for any and all phenomena that can be considered "program effects" and judges these against actual needs.

Ethnographic inquiry also fits relatively well with various evaluation models that Patton (1980:54) groups under the label "transactional." These include the "responsive evaluation" model described by Stake (1975) and Parlett and Hamilton's (1976) "illuminative evaluation" model. (See also Guba and Lincoln's 1981 description of "effective evaluation," which incorporates principles of Stake's responsive model with naturalistic inquiry methods.) These and other recent evaluation models call for an orientation to evaluation audiences' specific information needs, an emphasis on program activities and processes as they occur in context, more open-ended and flexible inquiry, and the use of multiple criteria for assigning value(s) to programs and their individual components. The theoretical orientation and inquiry method of ethnography are generally consonant with these emphases; hence, the goodness of fit between ethnographic inquiry and these models of evaluation.

Ethnography And Locally Developed, Applied Research

Ethnography can also be a useful inquiry mode in practical research studies. In the last several years, I have been involved in several such studies that illustrate some of the kinds of questions ethnography can answer.

During a recent school year a large school district noticed that only a few of its many low-income schools with federal Title I compensatory education programs (since revised and labeled Chapter 1) had achieved sixth grade median reading-test scores at or above the 50th national percentile. This phenomena stood out for district officials, since the sixth-grade median in reading across all their Title I schools was at the 31st pecentile. They wanted to know, "What accounts for the higher scores of these schools? Are they using practices for teaching reading that are uniquely successful, practices that could be used with equal success in other, similar schools?" In collaboration with the district's research office, I undertook some fieldwork to address these questions. The fieldwork was not true ethnography. I could not, in the limited time available, fully peel back the social realities of participants nor could I fully document the functional links between various instructional activities, organizational arrangements, attitudes, students' learning, and test scores. But I did keep the ethnographer's phenomenological perspective on social life in mind; I did look holistically and inductively at phenomena in the schools; and I did follow the ethnographic cycle of inquiry depicted in Figure 1 in the last chapter. These strategies enabled me, in a few months, to form some inquiry-based hunches in response to the questions that district administrators had posed. (See Dorr-Bremme, 1981, for a more detailed description of the study and its findings. I use this study to illustrate a number of points throughout the following pages, referring to it as the "reading study" and, more often, "the Title I study.")

Another school-district-based study is currently raising and investigating similar questions. In this three-year effort, a more fully ethnographic mode of inquiry is being used to examine how, in pairs of

schools only a few blocks apart --schools serving student bodies virtually identical in all the usual background variables used to "explain" differences in achievement-- one happens to be consistently much more successful in helping its students learn than the other. In this inquiry, the team with which I am working is investigating administrators' ways of carrying out their duties, teachers' ways of teaching, procedures for hiring in these generally hard-to-staff schools, the interaction between teachers and classroom aides, and a number of other factors. These issues have become the focus of ethnographic observation and interviewing after two full years of study.

A third effort has yet to begin but nevertheless illustrates a variation on the theme of the last two examples. A district with an emphasis on, and a very specific orientation to, writing instruction and writing assessment has found that some of its teachers do a consistently better job of helping students develop the writing skills measured by the district's writing scale. The question again here is "What accounts for the difference?" But in this study, videotaping of classroom interaction during writing instruction is designed to provide a very detailed portrait of how the apparently more successful teachers introduce writing tasks, interact with students as they pursue them, provide students with feedback, etc.

Finally, still another large school district recently undertook a naturalistic study --it was not actually ethnographic but very well could have been-- to see how evaluation information was actually used in local schools and how use could be improved (King and Pechman, 1982).

All these studies have in common several characteristics that collectively make ethnography a useful inquiry tool. These characteristics

are (1) broad, open-ended questions of the what-is-going-on-here-and-how-can-we-account-for-it type; (2) issues to investigate for which contemporary educational and social science research can offer a plethora of reasonable hypotheses (think of all the things that could possibly account for any of the observed phenomena); (3) a concern with social-interactional processes and relationships among sets of processes; and (4) the need for detailed, low-inference, descriptive information which is sufficiently concrete to enable other practitioners to "know what to do." If conducting studies with these characteristics can benefit you and your organization, then practical fieldwork from an ethnographic perspective can be valuable to you.

Ethnographic Monitoring

The orientation and techniques of ethnography can be put to use in yet another way in a process called ethnographic monitoring. In ethnographic monitoring, a participant regularly (and usually for periods of short duration) steps back from the activities in which he or she is routinely engaged in order to view them as an ethnographer might. Employing ethnographic ways of examining and thinking about those activities, he or she becomes an inquiring participant, a more observant participant, in his or her own work setting. The goal is to challenge one's usual perceptions and customary explanations of on-the-job activities: to gain perspective on, and so to see more clearly and understand more fully, the activity that surrounds one and the events in which one participates.

With appropriate training in ethnography, participants can use ethnographic monitoring as a technique for identifying and resolving problems

and issues in their own work environments. They can also use it as a way of gathering data -- informally but systematically -- to inform routine decision making. Dell Hymes,* for example, has recommended it as a useful strategy for teachers in bilingual classrooms. He suggests that by stepping back from the flow of everyday, professional life and "monitoring" their students' naturally occurring talk in various school and classroom contexts, such teachers can see aspects of students' linguistic competence that do not ordinarily appear in their regular interactions with the teacher. Teachers, then, can take this more complete view of students' competence into account as they plan classroom teaching-learning environments. Others have given similar examples of how ethnographic monitoring can serve classroom teachers.

Ethnographic monitoring can also be of aid to those in administrative and management roles. At a recent conference session on applied ethnography, for instance, a junior high school vice principal described how she used ethnographic monitoring as a problem-solving tool. Faced with an increasing number of discipline referrals, she decided to spend a short time each day exploring their origins. She spoke with both students who were sent to her and the teachers that sent them following open-ended, ethnographic interviewing techniques. She also observed and took notes in classrooms that had produced numerous referrals. Her questions and observations focused, as an ethnographer's might, on the organizational exigencies and systems of belief and value that made referral a desirable course of action in particular circumstances for particular teachers. This

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* Hymes is an anthropologist, sociolinguist, and educator. I have borrowed and adapted the term ethnographic monitoring from him.

holistic, ethnographic approach suggested a holistic type of response: (1) working to change the institutional structures that encouraged referrals (and the loss of student learning time that accompanied them), and (2) providing support to classroom teachers that facilitated their handling discipline problems in the classroom.

On the basis of these two examples, you can extrapolate ways in which ethnographic monitoring can serve persons in various roles in your organization or agency.

In summary, ethnographic ways of inquiring about and reflecting on routine activity enable practitioners and their supervisors to do what they already do -- observe and draw action-relevant conclusions about what is going on -- in a more considered and systematic way.

The Costs And Limitations Of Ethnography

While ethnography has many advantages, it also has a number of disadvantages. These tend to be limitations on how practical it is to use ethnography in its fullest form. Primarily, ethnographic inquiry requires considerable amounts of time and labor. It tends, therefore, to be expensive --a practical disadvantage in most circumstances. Costs, in turn, tend to restrict the number of settings an ethnographer can study thoroughly. This becomes a disadvantage when the number of program settings is great and the sponsors or audiences of the evaluation or study feel that there is a need to provide data that meet the usual standards for generalizability. An alternative is to visit more sites and to study each less thoroughly. Some useful impressions and hunches can be gleaned quickly by keeping the phenomenological orientation of ethnography in mind and

reducing the number of inquiry cycles in each setting. (This is what I attempted to do in the Title I reading study, and my audience seemed to find my informed hunches of some value.) But to comprehend program or organizational activities validly in ethnographic terms, i.e., holistically and from participants' perspectives, is nearly impossible in a brief period --unless of course the program or operations under study are very limited in scope. Furthermore, where evaluation information is needed in a short time and needed in the form of a definitive, final report with full documentation, ethnography can be impractical. Not only does fully ethnographic fieldwork require an extended time on site, but the great amounts of field-note and related data it generates require considerable time to reduce, analyze and write up. Many ethnographers suggest the following "rule of thumb": for every time unit on site (hour, day, etc.), allow an equal unit for final analysis and write up. Others suggest that the ratio of on-site time to final-analysis-and-write-up time is 1:2 or even 1:3. (I tend to agree with the 1:2 estimate.)

Giving actual dollar costs for some ethnographic studies is an exercise of very limited value. What a dollar can buy changes rapidly these days, and the information soon becomes outdated. What one should want to know is what each dollar buys. I don't have access to detailed budgets, and I find it difficult to give a succinct description of the merits and worth of the various studies. Nevertheless, it may be of assistance to you to have some "ballpark" estimates. Below I give two: one for each of the first two studies described in the last section.

The Title I reading study that I described ran the school district around seven or eight thousand dollars, almost all of it compensation for my time at current rates. During that study I visited four schools for an

average of six full school days each, (although that on-site time was spread out over a period of two-and-a-half months). I interviewed staff members, made twenty or thirty brief (e.g., twenty-minute) observations of classrooms, reviewed some school documents, and wrote a report of some eighty pages that identified my hypotheses: four major and three minor factors, features of classroom teaching and instructional organization, that might account for the schools' higher scores.

The second study I described will cost a school district nearly two hundred thousand dollars over its three years. Again, this will be spent largely on personnel costs. Three district employees will have spent roughly 50 percent of their time on the project over its three years; three Ph.D.-type senior researchers "rented" from local research institutes will have spent about 20 percent of their time on the study through the same years. Nine elementary schools will have been visited, six of them frequently and intensively (about a day-and-a-half per week), during the inquiry. One report of 150 pages has already identified and documented (albeit thinly and anecdotally) a number of common district administrative and teaching weaknesses. Another of similar length will provide much richer documentation of demonstrably effective administrative and instructional practices. Add to these a number of interim reports, test score analyses in support of the fieldwork, and the fact that the three researchers will be fairly well trained in ethnographic inquiry, and you have some sense of what the money bought.

What these brief examples cannot convey, of course, is the quality of the work done. And no one can adequately measure the degree of use or impact the work may have. The districts treated the work as valuable; they

disseminated the written reports more widely and with more energy than (all testimony indicates) they are used to doing. But the key point to consider is probably this: survey research, structured interviews, test-score analyses --all of which could have "covered" more schools in much less time-- could not have gathered the kind of concrete, descriptive information that can enable teachers in the district to say, "I want to try these practices and this report tells me exactly what they look like in a way that enables me to do so."

In summary, you need to decide whether ethnography is an appropriate mode of inquiry for a particular evaluation or study in view of: (1) the questions and issues that need to be addressed; (2) the scope of the program or other social activity you need to study; (3) the qualities of the information you need (e.g., how accurate? how certain? how concrete? how generalizable?); and, (4) the time frame and dollar resources within which inquiry must be conducted. The information that I have given you in this chapter (and will in next) should help you to make this decision.

CHAPTER 3

GETTING HELP WITH ETHNOGRAPHY

If you decide to proceed with ethnography, you will almost certainly need the help of an accomplished ethnographer. Why you will need help, how you can get it, and the forms it can usefully take are the subjects of this chapter.

Why Employ An Ethnographer?

Ethnographic fieldwork can appear at first glance to be relatively simple to do. While researchers in the "quantitative" tradition can point to a body of technical knowledge (research design, statistics, and so on) that is absolutely essential for their mode of inquiry, ethnography initially seems to have no equivalent prerequisites. Thus, newcomers to ethnography often find themselves thinking: "Observing people as they go about their usual activities? Questioning people and listening to what they say? Describing things in narrative prose? Reaching conclusions about what is going on in the places I visit? None of that seems especially difficult. I do those things everyday. Of course I know that ethnographers receive training. But I'm a reasonably intelligent person and I'm sure I can make a successful go of fieldwork with a little reading and a few tips." Those who have been trained in some other mode of research sometimes reason in this way and add, "...and besides, I know how to formulate questions and focus inquiry already--and this seems much

less complicated than the kind of work I am used to doing." And neophytes who foresee an inquiry project in a setting with which they are already familiar often add, "Anyway, I already have a pretty good idea about how things work there. That makes up for my lack of experience."

None of this is meant to parody or disparage the very real perceptions and feelings that many who are new to ethnography have. The component techniques of ethnographic fieldwork are similar to what we all do every day. Knowledge of ideas that underlie research in general can be advantageous in learning to do ethnography. Some familiarity with the kind of setting you are about to study is beneficial. Furthermore, it is absolutely true that virtually anyone can spend some time observing and talking to people in a setting and return with an account of what is going on and how things work there. For all these reasons, the initial reactions of many people to ethnography are understandable and legitimate. But for these same reasons it is especially important for you to recognize that in order to do ethnography and do it well, considerable training and experience are necessary.

Neophyte fieldworkers, even those with some "book learning" in ethnographic methods, routinely make several kinds of serious errors. The information they gather, for example, is nearly always sketchy and fragmented. Important details about each event they observe are absent, and they are especially likely to "miss" data that allows them to substantiate connections and relationships among phenomena. In

consequence, neophytes at fieldwork rarely have the data to substantiate the generalizations that they make (and when they do have it they often fail to recognize and present it.) Good ethnographic data should be literally descriptive; but beginners tend to write their field notes in highly interpretive or inferential terms. Thus, their work tells more about their own preconceptions and values than it does about the program, organizational operations, or setting they are supposed to be studying; what is more, the accounts that they construct rarely explore or explain the social realities of participants in the endeavor they are examining. Beginners' reporting also tends to be extremely diffuse, poorly focused. Rather than identifying and developing a small set of key themes or issues, their studies usually cover many topics superficially.

These may seem to be very harsh judgments of the work of those new to ethnography. But in my ten years' of work training both highly competent university graduate students and astute professionals, I found that it is only the rare individual who avoids these difficulties in his or her first experiences in the field. And these are only a few of the most common problems that characterize the work of those new to ethnography.

It should be apparent, then, that it is very unwise to undertake an ethnographic evaluation or study with untrained or minimally trained personnel. The quality of the evaluation or study that you will receive if you choose to take this course will be severely compromised; its ability to actually inform the decisions you need to

make will be very problematic. Thus, if you decide to pursue ethnographic inquiry, you should choose between hiring a practiced ethnographer to conduct your inquiry or hiring one to train you or your staff.

Determining The Ethnographer's Role

What kind of assistance should you ask an ethnographer to provide? The answer depends upon your organizational or professional needs and circumstances.

Obtaining training in ethnography is usually wise only if you or your organization anticipates a recurrent or continuing need for comprehensive ethnographic inquiry. Effective ethnographic training is field-based and clinical. It entails repeated cycles of instruction, practice, supervision, and feedback. Investing the time and other resources required for such training usually makes sense only when the persons to be trained will employ their ethnographic skills over the long term. So, for example, if you or your staff have regular responsibilities for conducting research and evaluation studies of a kind that can benefit from ethnography (or from its component techniques --interviewing, observing, etc.), you should give training in ethnographic fieldwork serious consideration. Training is also the appropriate option when you expect practitioners on your staff to use ethnographic inquiry skills routinely and informally in practical, problem-solving explorations.

Alternatively, if you have only one, rather small-scale study to be done right now --and/or if you expect that occasions for ethnographic inquiry will arise only rarely-- you will probably be better off seeking an experienced ethnographer to conduct inquiry for you. Why allocate resources to training that you or your staff will seldom use? Why delay inquiry until training has been completed? The same resources that you would invest in training will allow an experienced ethnographer to spend many hours in the field, and he or she can set to work immediately as a consultant or sub-contractor for your organization. Of course, if you anticipate a series of small ethnographic studies-- studies that are limited enough in scope for one person to do-- you may want to consider bringing an ethnographer on board full time.

A third option is to have an ethnographer provide training for your staff and then to work collaboratively with them in designing and carrying out your project(s). This can work well when you have a single, long-term study or evaluation to do, especially if it involves too many sites for one ethnographer to "cover" comprehensively. The ethnographer can begin inquiry immediately in one or a few sites, simultaneously using those sites and the study's issues as a basis for training exercises. As training proceeds and trainees become more adept, the study can be expanded to include additional sites or settings. The ethnographer can either continue to participate in the inquiry or his/her role can be changed to a strictly supervisory one.

Whether it is advisable to hire the ethnographer in a full- or part-time capacity depends upon the scope of the inquiry to be done, the number of staff to be trained, and future organizational needs.

Finally, you may find it helpful to call on an ethnographer simply to discuss your personal or organizational needs for ethnography. He or she can add to the advice this booklet offers in helping you think through whether you want to pursue ethnography, the kinds of help you need, and ways for getting that help.

Locating An Ethnographer

Finding a qualified ethnographer to help you may take a bit of time, but it is not difficult. One way to go about it is to ask professional acquaintances for recommendations. A small but growing number of school districts, medical organizations, and other social service agencies now employ anthropologists or sociologists with training and experience in ethnography. Many more have used their services as consultants. It is possible, therefore, that your colleagues (perhaps even someone in a setting very similar to yours) will be able to suggest the names of ethnographers with whom they have worked successfully.

You may also be able to locate an appropriate ethnographer through a nearby college or university. In most major universities, ethnographers are most likely to be found in the department of anthropology. They may also be affiliated with the schools or departments of education, medicine, social welfare, and/or others. In

smaller institutions, they may be located in an interdisciplinary unit, such as a department of social science or behavioral sciences.

The best way to proceed is to call nearby schools and ask for the department of anthropology. (If there is none, the operator should be able to direct you to a department that incorporates anthropology or sociology.) Explain your interests and needs to the departmental secretary or chairperson. They should be able to direct you to someone who can help you.

Another option is to seek assistance from the professional organization to which most anthropologists in the United States belong, the American Anthroplogical Association (AAA). This group maintains files of members with interest and competencies in various fields of anthropology (educational anthropology, medical anthropology, the anthropology of aging, etc.). They also have lists of members who have volunteered to give talks, workshops, and so on. To obtain help from the AAA, write to: Director of Programs, American Anthroplogical Association, 1703 New Hampshire Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C., 20009. Explain the nature of your interests or project. The Director will forward the names and addresses of persons in your geographic area who seem to have relevant qualifications. (The AAA will not recommend any individual, however.) In addition, the AAA Director of Programs may suggest that you write to one of the organizations affiliated with the AAA, such as the Council on Anthropology and Education, the Society for Applied Anthropology, etc., as seems appropriate in light of your request.

Do not become discouraged in your search if you find yourself repeatedly referred from one group or individual to another. Requests for an ethnographer to help with practical projects are not unusual, but neither are they routine. Few colleges, universities, and departments have set procedures for dealing with requests of this type. If you are directed to a society or council affiliated with the AAA, that group may not have an office or secretary charged with responding to your request. Keep in mind, too, that even when you reach an ethnographer, he or she may not have the time, interests, or professional background to assist with your work. There are, however, a great many qualified ethnographers (anthropologists, sociologists, and others) throughout the country who are interested in opportunities to offer training and to conduct practical, applied studies. With patience and a bit of persistence, you should be able to find one with whom you can work smoothly and productively.

Selecting An Ethnographer

Everyone who has training and experience in ethnographic fieldwork will not be equally qualified to help you. You should "shop" for an ethnographer by explaining your needs and goals to those who are interested and eliciting their responses.

There are, of course, no "foolproof" criteria for selecting an ethnographer to conduct training or inquiry on your behalf. Nevertheless, I strongly suggest that you keep in mind the following guidelines in making your choice.

1. Select An Ethnographer Who Has Expertise And Fieldwork Experience In Your Professional Area. Because ethnography is an inductive, responsive-adaptive mode of inquiry, many people assume that ethnographers enter the field as a "blank slate": that ethnographers proceed without initial knowledge or background information about the society, setting, or aspect of life that they are studying, that all their ideas and analytical constructs are derived from the site in the course of the investigation. Those who make this assumption have the notion that prior information would somehow "taint" the naturalistic, inductive process of ethnography. This is a mistaken view.

When ethnographers begin a particular study, they have a wealth of theoretical and empirical knowledge about the nature of culture and social organization in general and about the ways in which particular societies around the world structure their social life. If they have chosen to focus their inquiry on a specific aspect of social activity (e.g., child rearing, kinship, folk theories of disease and curing, etc.), they have studied how that activity is carried out in a wide variety of different social groups. When they have chosen to focus their investigation upon a particular region, community, or group, they have taken the time to read all the previous work they can find that describes and analyzes life in that setting.

This background knowledge and information is important to the ethnographer throughout the course of inquiry. During his or her early days in the field, it gives the ethnographer an initial sense of

"what is going on here," enabling him or her to find his/her way about among the group under study. It alerts the ethnographer to group members' sensitivities, formal rules of protocol, and informal etiquette, so that he or she can begin to establish good relations with the people with whom she/he must now live and work. Background information also gives the ethnographer a repertoire of ways of thinking about and interpreting what he/she sees in the setting under study; it helps him or her to formulate questions and hunches as the study proceeds. In analysis, it informs the ethnographer's choices regarding what issues are important to address and what general analytic constructs are appropriate to employ. Knowing the issues in the field also enables the ethnographer to shape his or her account in ways that are clear and understandable to the audience of the study: e.g., to decide what is commonly known and believed by his or her readers, what will require more explanation, what readers are likely to find unique, interesting, and particularly useful.

For all these reasons, the ethnographer that you select should have knowledge and fieldwork experience in the areas in which you need ethnography to be done. He or she will need it in order to conduct fieldwork on your behalf, but it is also an important prerequisite for effective fieldwork training. That training should be tailored to the kinds of inquiry questions and tasks that trainees will need to address. Training readings and assignments, examples and feedback, should be offered with an eye to the how things routinely work in the settings to be studied. This kind of training cannot be provided by

an ethnographer who is not learned in your professional field or who has not done fieldwork in settings such as those you need to have studied.

Finding an ethnographer who meets this criterion will probably not be impossible. (It may, however, be easier for you if you are located in an area that has a large pool of ethnographers to draw upon.) Many experienced ethnographers have specialized knowledge and fieldwork experience in one or a few specialized areas, and many of these are relevant to organizations and agencies in the United States. There are, for example, educational anthropologists, medical anthropologists, and legal anthropologists who have studied their specialties in American settings. There are those who have focused on the anthropology of aging or the anthropology of foods and nutrition. Still others trained in ethnography ply their craft by examining community development issues or social-service delivery systems. Within these and the many other "topical" specializations of anthropology and sociology, there are ethnographers with particular orientations and experiences. For instance, you may find medical ethnographers with experience in studying mental-health-care systems, life in medical schools, or the holistic health movement. Some educational anthropologists have devoted their efforts to fine-grained ethnographies of classroom interaction; some have studied education in the workplace; others have explored issues relevant to bilingual-bicultural education.

You should be aware that these specializations exist wthin the fields of anthropology and sociology, and you should seek an

ethnographer with specialized knowledge and experience in the area in which you need inquiry to be done.

2. Choose An Ethnographer With Experience In Practical, Applied Inquiry. You will want the ethnographer you select to work collaboratively with you and/or others in your organization in thinking through your inquiry needs and problems. You are not an expert in ethnography. You will want to the ethnographer you choose to help you understand your options and help you shape the design of your inquiry or training program. In order to do so, the ethnographer must be familar with the kinds of practical institutional constraints that typically surround applied studies and ethnographic training in professional settings. He or she must have a repertoire of ways of responding to these exigencies while still maintaining the integrity of the inquiry or the training "curriculum." An ethnographer experienced in applied work should be better attuned to your interests and requirements than one who is not. He or she should be more familiar with the consultative role you will want her or him to play and better able to raise the questions and issues you need to consider. As a result of his or her past experience, he or she will also be more likely to have a richer repertoire of workable solutions to the kinds of problems and constraints that are likely to appear as you examine your needs and resources.

You should also bear in mind that an ethnographer with a background in practical, applied inquiry is more likely to develop a reporting strategy and produce reports that will actually help you

make the decisions you need to make. You may need a single, comprehensive, written report; but a set of oral presentations, a set of short documents, or some other form of reporting may be more helpful to you. One who has done ethnography in applied contexts will be in a better position to help you decide. Furthermore, in an applied study, ethnographic findings usually need to be delivered succinctly; they need to be shaped such that they take into account the action alternatives decision makers have available ; and, at the same time, they must be presented in a way that maintains the integrity and richness of the ethnographic description and evidence. To accomplish all this requires skills that many who are new to applied ethnography do not have.

If you need an ethnographer to provide training, experience in applied work is also important. One is in a far better position to teach others the art of ethnographic evaluation inquiry or applied research when one has actually done such work oneself. In addition, techniques used in training graduate students in ethnography are not always the most appropriate in the in-service training of professionals. Thus, you will probably have a more satisfactory program of training in ethnography if you obtain the help of an ethnographer with experience in applied fieldwork.

3. Look For An Ethnographer Who Asks Questions And Listens Well. Choose an ethnographer who spends a great deal of time asking you questions and listening to what you have to say, especially in your initial interaction with him or her. Questioning and listening are

important fieldwork skills, but this is only one reason why you should select someone who displays them in meetings with you. Before an ethnographer makes a firm commitment to your project, before he or she begins to suggest alternatives for inquiry or training, there is a great deal of information he or she should have. He or she can only obtain this information by listening at length to your descriptions of your interests and needs and by askng you questions that help you elaborate them.

Ethnographers you interview should be interested in learning about how you are thinking of using ethnography. They should ask about the kinds of questions your studies will need to address and the number of settings in which you think information will need to be gathered. They should also be interested in what will be done with the information that is gathered: who will refer to or use it, in what contexts, and for what purposes. In addition, they should also be concerned with the resources for and constraints upon your project. They should want to know, for instance, about the number of staff to be trained, the time frame within which training and/or inquiry must be accomplished, and the dollars that can be allocated to the effort. They may also want to know about how much flexibility there is in your present thinking or plans for the project. (Can the number of sites to be visited be altered? Can the allocation of staff time for training be increased? Can deadlines be varied?) He or she may also want to know about the organizational politics and circumstances that surround the project. How much support is there for involving an

ethnographer and/or using ethnography? Is the move to ethnography controversial? Are those who support it likely to remain in their current positions and continue their support?

This brief listing only scratches the surface of the information a skilled ethnographer should want to have: first, in order to make a firm commitment to work with you, and second, to begin to lay out realistic alternatives for proceeding. Ethnographers who do not seek such information are indicating quite clearly that they are not seriously interested in the particulars of your setting and your project. But thorough understanding of these particulars is absolutely crucial to a successful evaluation or study, and it is just as critical to an effective training program. The wise and skilled ethnographer, therefore, will be one who listens and questions at length in order to gather all the relevant information you can provide about local needs, resources, and circumstances.

4. Avoid Ethnographers Who Emphasize That Your Project Can Be Done Quickly And Easily. Most ethnographers are enthusiastic about ethnographic inquiry and about the kinds of results that it can yield. They believe that ethnography is a powerful tool for learning and understanding. But classroom instruction and field experience have taught most thoughtful ethnographers a number of lessons about the complexity of their craft. One of these is that social life (such as the life that goes on around a social-service program) is extremely complicated. Studying it, they find, is like peeling an onion: once you come to reveal what exists at one level, you fnd that there is

much more beneath. Reaching generalizations about "what is going on" in social life and substantiating them with sufficient evidence, therefore, takes time -- more time than those who are unfamiliar with ethnography initially imagine. A second lesson that most experienced ethnographers have learned is that learning to do ethnography well is not easy; it takes considerable practice. Indeed, as with many other professions, learning ethnography is a continuing, life-long process.

Having come to these points of view, most proficient and experienced ethnographers are wisely cautious about the conditions under which ethnography can reasonably be done and under which ethnography can readily be learned. You should look for this caution in the ethnographers you consider employing.

If you and/or your organization are similar to the majority who look for assistance with applied ethnography, you have never worked with an ethnographer before and you are only generally familiar with the ethnographic method. As a result of your limited experience with ethnography, and in light of your organization's needs, you are likely to do what most others in a similar position have done: mis-estimate what ethnography or ethnographic training can reasonably accomplish within the resources available for your project. And if you are like most in your position, you will err on the optimistic side. That is, you will expect more than ethnographic training or inquiry can deliver for the dollars and time you are thinking of allocating.

This is to be expected. A great many factors come into play in estimating what can be done with ethnography, by what deadlines, with

what dollars, personnel, and other organizational supports. Consider: to make such an estimate you need to assess and balance the precise nature of the questions to be answered; the number of sites and settings in which phenomena of interest take place; the variations in those sites and settings that may influence the activities of interest, the number of sites it therefore makes sense to visit; the kinds of data collection strategies that provide valid and reliable data on the issues of interest; the number of times that each site and setting within a site will need to be visited in order to obtain the quality of data necessary to understand and substantiate what is going on using the appropriate data collection techniques; and a great deal more. At the same time, all these determinations must be balanced with (since they interact with) the funds available for the effort, the number of persons available to visit sites, the level of certainty and detail that decision makers will need to have in the information collected, and the time frame within which work must be completed. Similar considerations come into play in estimating how much and what kind of training you or your staff will need to receive in order to use ethnography in the ways that you hope to. Even after you read this booklet and become sensitized to these issues, you will not have the preparation and experience to peform the complex balancing act that these estimates require. And, like most others in your position, you will probably look for and plan for more from ethnography and/or from the ethnographer you hire than it is reasonable and practical to expect.

All this should help you to understand why you should generally avoid ethnographers who emphasize that your project can be done quickly and easily. The wise and experienced ethnographer has learned to be cautious in setting goals for ethnography and ethnographic training. There are few instances in which an ethnographic study, or training for ethnography, can occur quickly and easily; and your judgments about the ease and speed with which your project can be done are likely to be optimistic. Thus, you should select an ethnographer who approaches your plans thoughtfully, who helps you with your estimates of what can be done for what resources, and who works with you to plan a realistic, effective program of inquiry and/or staff training.

Guidelines For Training

If you opt for training in ethnography, you should expect the training you receive to follow the principles of sound pedagogy. In this section, I present some guidelines for a program that incorporates these principles.

1. Training in ethnography should be adapted to meet your needs. As I suggested above, the training that you or your staff receive in ethnography should be tailored to local needs. In order to provide such training, your ethnographer will need to have detailed information on both who is to be trained and what they are to be trained for.

Information on the trainees should help the ethnographer understand their background and previous training in research and, in particular, in fieldwork-related skills (e.g., observation, interviewing, document analysis, etc.) This will help the ethnographer to make some initial decisions about where training should begin, how it should be paced, etc.

The ethnographer should also learn about the trainees' present and recently past roles and responsibilities in your organization. This information will help your ethnographer to understand and take into account the particular biases and mindsets that trainees are likely to bring to their training experience and to the inquiry that they will conduct. It will also help your ethnographer understand how your trainees are likely to be perceived in their new, fieldworker role by persons in the study settings. This information can be useful as the ethnographer plans training experiences that deal with how to negotiate entrance to sites and with how to establish one's purposes and identity on site during fieldwork.

Information on what the trainees are to be trained for should include: (a) the kinds of questions that you and/or your organization need to address through ethnographic inquiry; (b) the audiences and uses for the ethnographic information gathered; (c) the kinds of sites and settings within sites in which you expect that inquiry will need to be conducted; (d) the reporting strategies that seem most likely to facilitate the use of the ethnographic information collected. The ethnographer you hire will want to consider all this in designing a

program of training targeted to your organization's and trainees' practical needs.

2. Training In Ethnography Should Be A Clinical, Field-Based Experience. To be effective, a training program in ethnographic inquiry must be clinical and field-based. It should provide trainees with recurrent opportunities to practice fieldwork skills under the supervision of an accomplished ethnographer-trainer and to receive detailed, individualized feedback on their performance. Furthermore, many of these practice exercises should be conducted in field settings similar to those in which trainees will actually work once their training has ended. Each, constitutive skill of ethnographic fieldwork should be taught in this clinical way.

Training for observation should entail actually doing observations of diverse kinds of social activities in a variety settings. Trainees should be given feedback individually on when they begin and end observation, where they physically position themselves in the setting in order to observe, and what they notice and fail to notice. Their rough notes and final write-ups should be reviewed in order to be sure that they are capturing critical information in a comprehensive way. To facilitate training in these areas, the ethnographer-trainer may want to assign some initial observing of films or videotapes by the group as a whole. (Using this strategy, the "noticings," notes, and write-ups of different members of the training group can be compared and differences in their accounts can be explored.) The ethnographer-trainer will certainly need to accompany trainees on some of their field observation assignments.

Similarly, trainees should be assigned to develop and conduct interviews of various types with persons in a variety of roles. Many of these should be tape-recorded so that the ethnographer-trainer can offer help on trainee's ways of questioning and probing, on their ways of responding to the interviewee and achieving rapport, on how they manage the interview and keep it on track, etc. Again, note-taking and write-up skills should be critiqued.

In order to provide trainees with experience in identifying patterns and themes in their data, in generating new inquiry questions in light of these, and integrating data in a "final" report, the training exercises can be organized into a small study. This can be one which serves as a "pilot" or "feasibilibity" study for inquiry that trainees will need to do once they have finished their training.

3. Training Should Begin With Inquiry Experiences. Most of what neophytes can read or be told about doing fieldwork makes little sense to them in the absence of field experience. The methodological precepts and "rules of thumb" seem to the beginner either esoteric and overwhelming or (and this is more often the case) extremely self-evident. Once the trainee has actually tried to do fieldwork, however, he or she can tie methodological guidelines to his/her own experience. The trainee's prior attempts at field inquiry generate curiosity and interest in resolving the difficulties he or she has encountered. Under these circumstances, readings and discussions of field methods are motivated, and they make more sense to the learner. For these reasons, I believe that it is wisest for training in

ethnography to begin with inquiry experiences that can generate a perceived need to learn on the part of the trainee. (For those familiar with instructional techniques, what I am recommending here will be recognizable as the "discovery" or "inquiry" method of teaching.)

Initial experiences in ethnographic inquiry may be undertaken in an actual field setting. Often, however, it works just as well to generate at least some first inquiry experiences in the classroom. One technique that usually works well with professionals, for example, is asking the trainee group to observe a documentary type of film or videotape and to take notes on what they observe as if they were actually present at the scene. As trainees recognize that they have perceived very different sequences of activity, that their accounts of what they observed tell distinctly different stories, they begin to see that descriptively valid observation depends upon knowing some theory and some observational skills. A similar approach can be used to begin training in interviewing: individual trainees can be asked in turn to conduct interviews using the very same interview questions. Divergences and weaknesses can be discussed and methodological issues can be identified.

4. <u>The "Input" of Information On Methodology Should be Integrated With and Practice Of Methodological Skills Throughout The Training Program</u>. This follows from the rationale given in the preceding paragraphs. It is also sound pedagogy to allow opportunities for the practice of new skills soon after they have been introduced. Each

skill can be practiced individually at first; later on, training exercises should entail the integration and use of the inquiry skills presented so far.

5. The Ethnographer-Trainer Should Do Practice Exercises Along With The Trainees. There are two reasons for this recommendation. First, the ethnographer's work on the same inquiry task can serve as a model for trainees, indicating what one good way of completing the task looks like. Second, as the ethnographer-trainer opens up his/her work for examination, discussion, and critique by trainees (which he or she should do), he or she helps to generate and sustain a "risk-free" environment which encourages trainees to do likewise. This is especially important in a group training program that is clinical in nature. For such a program to work, each participant must be willing to share his/her work, ask questions, and offer suggestions to others. Participants are more willing to do these things when they feel that the learning environment is "safe" and (ideally) comfortable: characterized by mutual respect and supportivefeedback. The ethnographer-trainer who makes his/her own work the subject of discussion, questions, and criticism facilitates such an environment by conveying that all work --even that of the experienced ethnographer-- deserves examination and evaluation toward learning and improvement.

6. Training Should Be Conducted In Small Groups. Small groups also help to facilitate the kind of safe, productive training environment mentioned just above. In addition, the type of clinical program

described thus far depends upon the ethnographer-trainer's capacity to give each trainee individualized critiques on each training task. The trainer simply cannot do this if the group is too large. Finally, a great deal of the learning that occurs in fieldwork training takes place as trainees examine one another's work: each group member's work is likely to underscore both some particularly useful ways of handling inquiry problems, as well as slightly different types of mistakes or weaknesses. For this reason, group training sessions are preferable to an exclusively one-on-one, tutorial approach. But again, the group must be small enough to give each member the chance to examine the other's work with care. I find a group of five or six ideal to work with; I believe that a group of about ten is the largest one ethnographer-trainer can work with effectively.

7. Training Should Include The Opportunity To Read Ethnographies On Relevant Topics. By the time that most university students in sociology or anthropology enroll in ethnographic methods courses, they have already been exposed to a great deal of ethnographic writing. The ethnographies that they have read serve as alternative models of what the end point of ethnographic inquiry should look like. (They present various ways of organizing accounts, integrating data of diverse types, etc.) Most professionals new to ethnographic fieldwork have never had the opportunity to see such models; most have never read an ethnography. It is important in fieldwork training that neophytes have some models in mind of where they are going in order for them to understand what kinds of inquiry and data are needed to get there. The wise ethnographer, therefore, will include reading of selected

of ethnographies in his or her training curriculum, especially those that deal with topics or issues in trainees' professional areas.

8. The Ethnographer-Trainer Should Monitor Trainee's Performance During Their First Fieldwork Study. If the ethnographer-trainer wll not work routinely alongside trainees after they complete their training, he or she should at least be avilable periodically to reivew their fieldwork skills as they conduct their first study. Actual fieldwork will often prsent issues and problems that training exercises did not anticipate. Beginners at fieldwork should have the help of an experienced ethnographer in resolving these. On their own in the field, some beginners will find it irresistable to take "shortcuts" that seriously compromise the quality of their data. They should be set back on track before these become bad habits. And all beginners will improve their skills by having fieldwork that "counts" checked and discussed by an accomplished ethnographer with whom they feel comfortable. Thus, during their former trainees' first study, the ethnographer-trainer should occasionally go on site with them in order to obsere and critique their ways of working. the trainer should also periodically review the products of their fieldwork, from rough notes through finished report. This can sometimes seen an unnecessary and expensive luxury, and it does add to the cost of training. But it will pay dividends many times over in the quality and utility of the fieldwork that trainees do.

None of the recommendations and suggestions in this chapter are foolproof, of course; but following them will in most cased help you and your organization get off to a good, solid start in ethnography.

Now, in the next part of the booklet, we'll turn to a step-by-step discussion of how to do practical fieldwork from an ethnographic perspective.

PART II

DOING PRACTICAL FIELDWORK FROM AN ETHNOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE

CHAPTER 4

LEARNING TO THINK AS AN ETHNOGRAPHER: THE ETHNOGRAPHIC ORIENTATION

The first step for anyone learning to do practical fieldwork from an ethnographic perspective is learning to think, question, and see as an ethnographer does. You can only begin to do this by reading this chapter. It explains the ethnographic orientation; but in order to learn it, you will need to practice it in a program of clinical training such as I outlined in the previous chapter. With this caveat in mind, let's turn to the matter of why one needs to know about or have an "ethnographic orientation."

Information I have presented in the first two chapters should indicate that from an ethnographic point of view the general research problem at hand in an evaluation or study is generally: (1) to identify certain aspects of locally situated social organization --actions or interactions which are, from the point of view of participants, routinely related in some way to the social program, innovation, or operations to be examined; and (2) to understand, describe, and explain these actions in terms of participants' social reality. The emphasis on understanding things from the social reality (or realities) of participants follows from the phenomenological perspective which lies at the foundation of ethnography and other naturalistic/qualitative modes of inquiry. Indeed, the reason that an inquirer would choose an ethnographic approach instead of some other is because he or she believes that in the case of this program or endeavor it is critical to understand what is happening and how it is happening in terms of participants' realities. And usually, this belief is based on another: that only by understanding things in terms of

participants' realities can one take action that is sensible, practical, and desirable in terms of the world in which participants see themselves as operating.

Now, in order to achieve the goals set out above as numbers (1) and (2), you must have some idea where to look, what to look, and (consequently) how to structure looking in order to identify and understand participants' notions of reality and sense of what things (actions, objects, kinds of people and situations) mean. You need some theory, preferably one based in and supported by a good deal of research, of how members of social groups organize their lives in light of their perceptions and interpretations of phenomena in their world.

Many of the books that deal with qualitative and naturalistic methods and their application in evaluation or other applied studies have no such theory to offer. They use such phrases as "reality, "meaning," "social reality," "the world as experienced by participants," and so on without clearly defining them, without indicating how you would go about locating them during fieldwork, and without demonstrating how you would write a description and analysis of social activity in terms of them. The reason for this is that most works entitled "naturalistic" or "qualitative" are describing a general inquiry approach. They are describing something which they treat as equivalent to the scientific or experimental method --a method which you can use to regardless of what the research is about. In order to produce such a generic equivalent, which is inherently independent of any particular content or discipline, they have separated ethnography from its anthropological conceptual structure. Their "naturalistic inquiry" or "qualitative research" is, for the most part, ethnography without anthropological constructs. And without the

theoretical principles and concepts of anthropology (or some closely related field such as the phenomenological sociology of someone like Max Weber), there is no sound way for defining and locating the realities and meanings known to a particular social group, for determining what they are and how they are manifested or displayed, or analyzing how they function in relation to the daily activities in which participants are engaged. In this chapter, therefore, I provide you with a theory which will help you do the things that I have just mentioned.

This theory has its foundations within the anthropological orientation usually called "cognitive anthropology," as well as in the related fields of sociolinguistics (or the ethnography of communication, e.g., Bauman and Scherzer, 1974; Gumperz and Hymes, 1972; Hymes, 1974) and ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967; Mehan and Wood, 1975). As I have indicated above, it is a theory of how group members generate and sustain organized social relations and of the role members' perceptions and interpretations of phenomena (their "realities") play in that process. As such, it includes a number of interrelated premises which elaborate the fundamental phenomenological axiom that persons act in terms of the meanings that persons, actions, and things have for them. I list and explain these premises first, ending with a description of social organizational process. Further on, I will point out what all of this means for how you should design a practical ethnographic inquiry based on this theoretical perspective.

Basic Theoretical Premises

A first, fundamental supposition of this theory is that organized social life is permitted by some set of operating principles, held more or less in common, for determining what behaviors and things mean. From the

perspective of some "cognitive" anthropologists, these more-or-less shared operating principles comprise a group's culture. In Goodenough's (1964:367) terms:

> a society's culture consists of whatever one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members, and to do so in any role that they accept for any one of themselves.

Elsewhere, culture has been similarly defined by Goodenough (1971:41) as a "system of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating and acting." From much the same perspective, Spradley (1972:29) has written of culture as founded in a set of cognitive rules: "...instructions for constructing, combining, interpreting, and otherwise dealing with symbols." From these "rules," Spradley suggests, are built cognitive maps (taxonomies or other classificatory schemes of kinds of people, things, social situations, etc., e.g., Cole, at al., 1971:51-91; Frake, 1980b,c; Hage, 1972; Tyler, 1969) and also plans (cognitive "programs" for sequencing a series of operations over time; c.f., Miller, Galanter, and Pribram, 1960).

Sociolinguists see this same kind of sociocultural knowledge as the basis of a "speech community" (Gumperz, 1972; Hymes,1974:4ff.) --a group that holds in common not only a language, but also a body of rules for determining the social appropriateness and social meaning of various forms of communicative forms of behavior. Similarly, ethnomethodologists maintain that members of a social unit make sense of others' behavior by employing shared (or presumed-to-be-shared, Cicourel, 1974:34) "background understandings" (Garfinkel, 1967) and "interpretive procedures" (Cicourel, 1974:51ff. and passim; Mehan and Wood, 1975:98-115).

In short, some body of sociocultural knowledge lies at the foundation of and facilitates social life. In general, this knowledge can be conceptualized as a series of generative principles for making sense of the world and acting sensibly in it.

This initial premise begins to flesh out the notions of "reality" and "meaning" which are so important to phenomenologically based inquiry. It should be apparent that the "realities" of primary interest to ethnographers are not those which abide idiosyncratically in particular individuals, but those of societal groups. Furthermore, these realities are not random or isolated bits of perception and interpretation; rather they are systemic in nature: coherent bodies of perception and belief, sets of standards for interpreting and acting, which recurrently and routinely guide group members' activities.

To refer to the systematic bodies of sociocultural knowledge that members of a particular societal group use to organize their perceptions, interpretations, and actions, many anthropological ethnographers use the term emic, which they constrast with the term etic.

Etic constructs or accounts consider phenomena from the point of view of standardized measurement ("or if not in terms of measurement at least in terms of systematic ways in which scientists as external observers define units" Erickson, 1977:60). More generally, the term etic refers to the ways in which the researcher-as-cultural-outsider perceives and interprets, classifies and categorizes, describes and explains the people, actions, things, etc., that he or she finds in the world of the social group under study. Thus, when a researcher makes up categories for an observational coding system (as in the Flanders Interactional Analysis), those categories are etic ones. They are the categories of the researcher, not those which people in the group under study usually use. By the same token, when an observer sitting in a classroom writes in her notes that the students are "on task," that is an etic judgment if the observer has made it without reference to how participants in the scene think of or react to the behavior.

Emic constructs and accounts, on the other hand, are those of the culture member or "insider," the ordinary actor in the setting under study. The categories that members of a medical staff use to refer to kinds of patients who come into the emergency room, for instance, are emic categories from an ethnographer's point of view. Used in the ethnographer's report, they remain emic, because they are those of the the group under study; the ethnographer did not make them up or choose them.

In the following passage Erickson (1977:60) contrasts the concepts "stature" and "height" in explaining the etic-emic distinction. His remarks indicate the kinds of "systems of standards for perceiving believing, evaluating and acting" in which ethnographers are typically interested.

> In everyday interaction, for example, people may treat the phenomenally continuous variable of height as if it were discontinuous, categorizing people as short, average, and tall in stature. Units of stature, then, would be social facts, [i.e., emic categories] defined in terms of people's discriminations of thresholds and the actions they take toward each other on the basis of those discriminations. The continuous variable height could be measured formally by an arbitrarily defined unit such as the inch or millimeter, capable of reliable use by observers in making low-inference judgments. These units of description could be used in valid and reliable ways within a system of technical categorization independent from functional categories or discontinuous "chunks" used by people in thinking of stature...
> Modern anthropology, sociology, and linguistics have shown a great deal of variation among human groups in the emic discrimination and emic salience of physical and social phenomena. Researchers in these disciplines can state systematically what is emic in everyday events and how people take action with regard to the emic. From my point of view, this is what is qualitative about research -- statements of the quality of things and relations, descriptions of events in functional terms.

Put another way, ethnographers' interests in how persons in a group systematically order their social lives direct their attention to the emic

categories (and ways of distinguishing among categories, e.g., of stature) that group members routinely employ and to the actions which members routinely take on the basis of these categories. Thus, the "meaning" in which ethnographers are most interested is social meaning --the functional significance that kinds of persons (statuses), actions, and things recurrently and rountinely have for group members, as manifested in the kinds of actions they routinely take with respect to them.*

A second theoretical premise further elaborates the fundamental notions of culture (or social reality) and social meaning set forth above. This is the premise that a social group's standards for sensibly and appropriately interpreting phenomena, ascribing meaning and value, and choosing actions can vary with features of the social context or situation. Ways of discriminating stature, for example, can change dramatically from one social context to another. (Consider the thresholds of "tall" and "short" that come into play in choosing astronauts and those used in selecting college players in the professional basketball draft.) Similarly, ways of appropriately making sense of a particular form of behavior can vary from situation to situation. (A student's raised hand may mean "I want the teacher's recognition" at one moment, "I volunteer to do a problem at the board" the next, and "I have an answer to that question" at still another.) Moreover, the very same way of behaving may be appropriate in one context and inappropriate in another just a second or two later,

* This does not mean that ethnographers are uninterested in the literal, referential meanings of words, gestures, etc. for persons in the group they are studying. (Hymes, 1982:25, for example, gives two excellent illustrations of the importance of knowing local lexicons.) Rather, the point here is that ethnographers' inquiry usually focuses on those aspects of meaning that go beyond the literal. It is what things mean in functional terms for societal members that claims primary attention in ethnography.

e.g., helping a friend solve a math problem just before the test; helping him or her after the test has begun.

The definition of social context (or social situation) intended here is a very specific one. As construed by many ethnographers, context refers to an interpretation of "who we are and what we are doing now" which circumscribes or frames the set of alternatives from which participants in a social scene make their next choices about what to do socially "now" and "next" (Bateson, 1972; Cicourel, 1974). Thus, contexts or situations may be nested one within another at various levels of interpretive generality. For example, a person in interaction may interpret the situation now as "a moment of misunderstanding in a casual social conversation with a colleague during a break between classes while at school when we first began to try out the new curriculum" --if he or she were to articulate an interpretation in so many words.

When one joins the view of social context stated here with the definition of culture given above, it follows that "culture ceases to refer to a generic phenomenon of study and refers instead only to some level of that phenomenon" (Goodenough, 1975:4). That is, the culture of any society as a whole--its "macroculture"--is a broad level of organization integrating numerous situation-bound cultures:

> Every human being, then, lives in what is for him a multicultural world, in which he is aware of different sets of others to whom different cultural attributions must be made and different contexts in which the different cultures of which he is aware are operative. His competence in any one of these is indicated by his ability to interact effectively in its terms with others who are acknowledged as already competent (Goodenough, op. cit.).

In summary, culture (or social reality) is multi-layered. A societal systems of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating, and acting varies with features of the social context or situation --features which are themselves interpreted by group members at various hierarchical levels.

The perspective taken here runs counter to viewpoint, widely held among non-anthropologists, that associates culture exclusively with groups of common geographic origin, i.e., with nationalities, ethnicities, residents of particular regions, etc. It emphasizes that within a given geographical boundary --within a region, community, or school, for instance-- culture can be distributed such that some standards for perceiving, believing, acting, and evaluating are shared by all or nearly all; others, by many; and still others, only by members of certain sub-groups. At the same time, one might find that persons in widely separated sites share some features of culture. (One can make a case, for example, that there is a "teacher culture" and also a culture of schools, e.g., Sarason, 1971)

Notice that the widely accepted, anthropological definition of culture that I have given you here is a definition that you can use. It highlights that the teachers in your schools or the staff members in your clinics may, in a very real sense, share a culture which is different than that of administrators. Non-professional staff may have some ways of making sense of the world that are systematically different than those of professionals. Alternatively (or even at the same time), all the staff members in a school, clinic, or branch in one community may be "culturally different" in some ways than those in another. The staff's ordered ways of viewing the world and acting in it may be at variance of those of people in the community they serve. And from one place to another there may be cultural differences in communities (even if they are ethnically and socioeconomically similar) that bear upon their use of and demeanor toward the services these institutions provide. Cultural differences of these kinds --differences in systems of standards for

perceiving, believing, evaluating, and acting-- can matter in the performance of new programs or routine tasks. Thus, the view of culture presented here provides a useful conceptual tool for understanding how the enactment of institutional activities has come to be shaped as it is. But bear in mind that this is a conceptual tool that should be used very carefully. If studying the "realities" of actors in a setting does not mean studying individuals' idiosyncratic viewpoints, neither does it mean taking for granted that all participants in a setting, all members of a particular occupational category, all members of a particular racial or ethnic group, etc., know and experience reality in identical ways. The good ethnographer never assumes that members of some group share elements of culture. Whether they do is a question for inquiry. In order to address that question, the ethnographer looks for salient emic contexts --those that participants in the setting under study routinely recognize and act on-- and examines whether there are systems of standards for seeing the world and taking action in it that participants consistently, systematically draw upon in those contexts. (How this is done is discussed in subsequent chapters.)

Implicit in the theoretical tenets presented thus far is another that deserves explicit mention: in the view taken here, the culture (or social reality) and behavior of a social group are in constant, dialectical relationship. In a process that goes on continuously in real time as group members conduct their everyday affairs, culture informs action and simultaneously action embodies and manifests culture. That is, as persons interact with one another, they draw upon and use their sociocultural knowledge --their notions of kinds of contexts, people, actions, and things; their systems of beliefs, ideas, and values; their standards for interpreting others' behavior appropriately and choosing appropriate

actions in context. And as they draw upon and use this sociocultural knowledge, their behavior becomes patterned in certain routine ways. Thus, patterns of behavior are constructed in interaction; and in the behavioral patternings that they routinely construct, group members display their sociocultural knowledge, projecting it (and the social meanings and views of reality that it entails) onto and into the world, making it available to others, and so generating and sustaining it.

Social reality is intersubjective: a social phenomenon not only in the sense that it is of or pertaining to society, but in the sense that it is by society, i.e., produced and maintained conjointly by group members. Put in Mehan's (1982:64) terms, the constitutive ethnographer treats culture as "intersubjective praxis (human productive and interpretive practices) instead of either a subjective state or an objective thing." Thus, it is appropriate to view

> ...the objective facts and subjective states associated with education, like those associated with other cultural domains, are interactional accomplishments. "Classroom organization," curricular programs," "teacher effectiveness," and other so-called "objective" aspects of schooling are intersubjective phenomenon, constructed in interaction. Similarly, "students' abilities," "students' intelligence," "teachers' styles," and other seemingly subjective states of individuals are intersubjective phenomena, displayed in interaction (Mehan, 1982:64).

A Theory Of Social Organizational Process

Inherent in the premises explained above is a theoretical model of social organizational process. The model describes how such intersubjective features of social organization as educational programs are constructed or "accomplished" in interaction as participants draw upon and use their sociocultural knowledge (or, their socially generated and sustained conceptualizations of reality). I review this theoretical model below, then go on to explain some of its main implications for the design and conduct of evaluation inquiry.

Participants in face-to-face interaction perpetually scan the scene, taking in a plethora of perceptual "data" (Spradley, 1972). They routinely gather information on the time, location, and personnel present (Erickson, 1971; Goffman, 1974); and they attend to one another's actions. As McDermott (1976) has put it, persons in interaction become environments for each other. The behavior of all participants in the scene, enacted through many behavioral modes simultaneously, bears information for each other participant about the evolving definition and direction of the social situation at hand. Lexical, syntactical, and paralinguistic behaviors can carry meaning. So, too, can gaze direction, body orientation and posture, interpersonal distance, gestures, and so on. At any given moment, a person's behavior in all these channels can contribute to the total "message" he or she is seen as sending at that moment. (See Dorr-Bremme, 1982, for a comprehensive review of research supporting these points.)

Drawing upon upon socioculturally based systems of standards or background understandings of the type noted above, participants in the interaction encode, organize, and interpret the perceptual data they are constantly receiving: they make sense of "who we are and what we are doing now" (Cicourel, 1974; Goffman, 1961; Mehan and Wood, 1975: 102-1060). But even given an adequate practical knowledge of sociocultural standards, what particular behaviors, objects, etc. mean in context is not unproblematic for participants. From an ethnomethodological perspective:

> all symbolic forms [rules, vocal utterances, gestures, actions, things in the setting] carry a fringe of incompleteness that must be filled in, and filled in differently every time (Mehan and Wood, 1975:90).

For example, in speech we never say all that would be necessary and sufficient in order to be understood by a person who knew nothing about our

social world. We assume knowledge on the part of others; we expect them to be able to fill in around what we literally say in order to understand what we mean. To do this filling in, persons draw upon their sociocultural knowledge, their understandings--understandings that include more-or-less rough cognitive maps and plans of how the social world is organized; "facts" and assumptions about what things are, how they are related, etc.; as well as rules for behaving and making sense interactionally. But, because each person has had experiences of and in the world which are slightly different, because sociocultural knowledge is differentially distributed among members of a society (Gearing and Sangree, 1978; Wallace, 1970), and because the social context at the moment can be differentially "read" (e.g., Erickson, 1975), persons may each do the filling in differently than another would and differently than the speaker assumes others will. (See Garfinkel, 1967:38ff. for additional explanation and illustration of this point.)

Thus, sociocultural standards (or understandings or rules) do not "tell" participants in social interaction how to make sense of others' behavior or what the situation is now; they do not "give" persons interpretations of social phenomena. Social life is too fluid and varied to warrant such a construction. Rather, sociocultural rules, maps, and plans should be construed as a body of resources upon which participants creatively draw in making sense of what others are meaning by what they do.

Simultaneously, of course, as participants engage in this work of interpreting--attending to and making sense of the scene and others emerging behavior--they themselves are also acting. As they interpret "who we are and what we are doing now" from moment to moment, they are

perpetually determining how to act appropriately given their interpretations and given their social intents at the moment, i.e., what they hope to achieve by what they do. And they act perpetually on the basis of these determinations. Just as sociocultural standards do not tell persons the correct interpretation of others' behavior, they do not mandate what, specifically, is appropriate for a person to do at a particular moment in interaction.

As Cazden (1974) suggests, interaction is ordered along two basic dimensions. It is ordered sequentially across time in relationship to actors' social intents and the ongoing stream of activity in which actors are engaged. This Cazden refers to as the "syntagmatic" dimension of interaction. (Thus, one can speak of syntagmatic rules or rules of "horizontal co-occurrence," Ervin-Tripp, 1972.) Along this dimension, at particular syntagmatic moments, participants have options for the ways that they can appropriately express their intentions. Those options constitute the paradigmatic dimension of social interaction. (Thus, one can also speak of paradigmatic rules, or rules of vertical co-occurrence and alternation, Ervin-Tripp, 1972.) In the flow of social life, then, persons constantly choose among appropriate alternative ways of realizing their social intents. Making those choices in ways that will from their point of view (based upon their sociocultural understandings) communicate the subtleties of their social perceptions and intentions at the moment is part of the creative activity in which participants in social exchanges routinely engage.

To summarize the theory of social interaction presented here: participants actively and creatively assemble social events in an ad hoc way. Drawing upon sociocultural rules, maps, and plans, they perpetually

interpret the event as new perceptual data are generated through others' actions. And they act perpetually on the basis of their interpretations, selecting among the options for behaving that their interpretations of the situation and of the relevant situational rules suggest are appropriate at the moment, given their social intents. In short, they are contributing to the event that they are interpreting and doing so on the basis of their interpretations of it. They are mutually informing one another, through their on-going behavior, of the definition and purposes of the event they are creating. All participants in a scene are simultaneously engaged in this "cybernetic" interactional work. And collectively, through this work, they are accomplishing a social event.

How does all this relate to an educational program, the routine operations of a medical clinic, the delivery of social assistance to aged, or some other endeavor you might be concerned with evaluating or studying? Very simply, any one of these social endeavors can be appropriately construed as a series and/or network of social events assembled through the process that I have just described.

Now, in beginning this chapter on the ethnographic orientation, I suggested that the information I presented here should direct the design and conduct of ethnographic inquiry. Just what ethnographic inquiry following from this theory should look like is the subject of the next chapter. In the title of this booklet, we are about to move from the "ethnographic perspective" to "practical fieldwork" and how to do it.

CHAPTER 5

DESIGNING PRACTICAL FIELDWORK FROM AN ETHNOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE: SOME GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Every ethnographic inquiry you undertake should be uniquely designed in light of the evaluation or study questions that need to be addressed, audience information requirements, the nature of the settings of the study, and a variety of practical contingencies (fundings, time and deadlines, etc.). Nevertheless, there are a number of general principles that any practical, ethnographic fieldwork should follow. I list and explain each of these in this chapter. I also explain how each follows from the ethnographic orientation described in the preceding chapter.

Principle #1: Emphasize Ethnographic Observation

Ethnographic inquiry designed in light of the ethnographic orientation set out above should allocate resources such that ethnographic observation took precedence over interviewing. This is a departure from what many advocates of generic naturalistic/qualitative evaluation usually recommend in that: (1) the latter place equal emphasis on interviewing and observing, suggesting that interviewing is especially important for getting at program participants' realities and notions of meaning; (this follows from their tendency to treat realities and meaning as subjective states that lie only in the minds of participants); and (2) ethnographic observation entails a kind of noticing or attending that is different than observing as described by most naturalistic/qualitative evaluators. Let us see how the theory above leads to these departures.

The theory of social organization presented in the last chapter posits that as persons proceed through their daily social lives, they interpret the context from moment to moment: they continually make sense of

"who we are and what we are doing now." And as they do they routinely select their current and next actions in light of the context as they have interpreted it, within the parameters of their sociocultural standards of appropriateness. This process goes on during interviews as it does during other social occasions. Interview respondents make sense of the situation: they draw upon their sociocultural knowledge to arrive at interpretations of such matters as the social identity of the interviewer (what "kind of a person" she/he is), his/her purposes for coming here, why he/she wants to interview me, what social rights and obligations the interviewer and I have with regard to one another in general and in this situation, and so on. As the interview itself unfolds, these and similar matters are the subject of continual interactional negotiation between researcher and respondent as they "read" one another's fact-to-face behavior (Cicourel, 1974; Erickson and Shultz, 1982).

Furthermore, the respondent is in the position of having to make sense of what, exactly, the interviewer wants to know. There are a great many ways of approaching and speaking about the aspects of one's personal knowledge and experience that appear to be indicated by even the simplest and most straightforward question. And (our theory tells us) language, along with other symbolic forms, is indexical. The interviewer cannot possibly say all that she/he means in so many words; she/he must count on the respondent's ability as a culture member to fill in meanings sensibly around what he/she says. Thus, at any given moment the respondent must interpret how to carve up (or arrange) and present his/her knowledge and experience; and he/she must do so based upon his/her general interpretive understandings of who the researcher is as a kind of social person, what the researcher's project is about, why he/she has been chosen as a

respondent, where the interview has been and where it appears to be headed, as well as in view of the wording of the particular query the interviewer has just posed.

In short, the interview places the respondent in a social context outside the flow of his everyday life and presents him or her with the task of producing, in this situation, talk about some aspect(s) of the program or other feature(s) of his/her daily affairs. What the interviewer receives, then, is not "facts" or even the respondent's perceptions of the facts. What the interviewer receives is a conjointly produced and situated account of some actions, thinking, or emotions. It is a conjointly produced account in that it is generated by the successive interactional moves of both respondent and interviewer. And it is a situated, or context-specific, account in that it is produced "here and now" within the successive frames of the respondents' moment-to-moment interpretations of what is going on and what that implies for his/her action choices. Whether the beliefs and values and feelings, the perceptions and interpretations, described in this situation are in any way functionally relevant to the program is problematic. Whether they are depends upon whether the interviewee holds, experiences, and uses them in taking action in one or another of a variety of naturally occurring, everyday contexts. And all of this remains true regardless of how carefully worded and sequenced the interview questions are, how much affective "rapport" is established, and how "truthful" the respondent strives to be. As anthropologist Charles O. Frake (1980a:50) has succinctly put it:

> The problem with [respondents'] verbalized interpretations is not a difficulty in eliciting them but in locating what cues are being responded to [by the respondent] in formulating a particular interpretation.

This does not mean that an ethnographic evaluator operating from a theory of social organization such as the one I have described would reject interviewing or would relegate interview accounts to the status of "mere talk." (I will discuss the role that interviewing can appropriately play a bit further on.) Rather, as Frake points out it mean that:

> Perhaps instead of trying to devise provocative questions and other instruments to persuade people to talk about things they do not ordinarily talk about in that way, we should take as a serious topic of investigation what people in fact talk about, or, better, what they are in fact doing when they talk. When we look at talk, we find that people do not so much ask and answer inquires; they propose, defend, and negotiate interpretations of what is happening. Because what is happening is what we are interested in explicating, these interpretations provide the key to understanding. Viewing informants not just as question-answers, but also as interpreters of their lives, provides not only a sounder perspective for handling problems of informant variability and reticence, but also a more realistic notion of the relation of cognitive systems to behavior (1980a:50).

The ethnographic fieldworker, then, should place heavy emphasis on observation and, in observing and documenting, upon the talk that program participants do in naturally occuring circumstances. He/she would do so not because seeing what is going on is more important than people's ideas and beliefs, values and interpretations. He/she would do so because the ideas, beliefs, values, and interpretations that people are using to generate what is going on, as well as their moment-to-moment sense of what is going on, are displayed in their everyday talk and actions. This follows from the premise that culture is intersubjective in nature. As Erickson (1978:6) has explained:

> The assumption is that people engaged in face-to-face interaction are constantly engaged in telling each other verbally and nonverbally what is going on, what the "rules" are, and what the context is -- and that careful analysis of their "telling" can elucidate their underlying purposes

> and rules of procedure. Statements of such regularities, then, would not be just an arbitrary construction of the researcher, but would actually make contact with the points of view of those involved in the action.

Observing with this assumption in mind is what I intended by the term ethnographic observation that I used in introducing this section. Observing ethnographically means keeping a weather eye (and ear) out for what people are "telling" one another as they interact about their sociocultural systems of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating, and acting; about their notions of kinds of people things, and social contexts; and about the situation-specific social meanings of actions. This kind of observing, it seems to me, entails a very different kind of noticing or attending than one would otherwise do, as well as to a different way of thinking about what one has observed. The nature of these differences is difficult to formulate succinctly; but the fact that they exist is indicated by the fact that Frake, as recently as 1977, felt impelled to urge ethnographers to observe in this way. And to reiterate: this kind of ethnographic observation should be the fundamental method of any practical fieldwork done from an ethnographic perspective.*

Principle #2: Use Interviews to Guide and Explicate Observation

For the reasons set for above, interviewing in an evaluation or study oriented by the ethnographic theory that I have presented would play an

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* How to do the sort of ethnographic observing mentioned here will be described in outline a bit further on. The interested reader, however, will find some detailed illustrations in the work of Erickson and Shultz (1981, 1982), Mehan (1979), Philips (1983), and Scheflen (1973, 1974), as well as in dissertations by Dorr-Bremme (1982) and McDermott (1976). Many of these studies are based on audiovisual documentation of interaction, but it is possible as research by Frake (1980b, 1980c) has shown, to learn to see with the naked eye and to document in field notes what participants are telling each other situationally about applicable cultural principles. The research assisted by audiovisual documents, however, provides the best foundation for the neophyte who wishes to learn, from the theoretical perspective presented here, what to look for and how to think about what one sees.

supplemental role. Most importantly, it would help to guide and explicate observation.

Interviews as a guide to observation. Interviews can guide the ethnographic evaluator's observations in two ways: (1) they can suggest where and when to observe; and (2) they can suggest issues and dynamics to attend to in observing.

Especially during the early stages of inquiry, interviewing can help the evaluator to locate the scenes in which, from participants' point of view, the program is routinely enacted. They can also help indicate which of these scenes participants construe as most central to their program efforts. Similarly, when interview respondents describe connections between program elements and other phenomena in their world, their remarks can direct observation to settings, scenes, and activities that might otherwise be deemed irrelevant to the program and its evaluation.*

Topics, themes, and issues worth attending to in observing can emerge from interviews both directly and indirectly. If, for example, interview respondents stated routinely and explicitly that an individual's "style of leadership" had significant bearing on the program and its effects, the ethnographic evaluator would probably want to pay special attention to that individual's patterns of interaction with other participants across a variety of recurrent contexts and to examine the functional links between

* Interview information, of course, is not the only guide an ethnographic evaluator would use in deciding where and when to observe. What program participants say and do in naturally occurring circumstances can serve as another, and sometimes better, source of direction. As an example, school-site participants in one California program routinely informed evaluators that site council planning meetings were the main scenes of program activities. But observation of these meetings revealed that key planning decisions were routinely made prior to the meetings themselves in casual conversations among committee members. This suggested the need to "track" committee leaders through their daily rounds in order to identify how critical program decisions were actually reached.

those patterns and subsequent events. Or again, suppose that sub-sets of participants offered systematically different views of which events were most essential to the program's enactment. Such a pattern in interview responses could imply that different groups within the setting held distinctly different interpretations of the program, different definitions of what the program is "all about." Observing with this possibility in mind, the researcher could consider whether participants' words and actions manifested these different perspectives and, if so, how their presence influenced the program's performance. Patterns in respondents' accounts of the program's history, its influences on organizational procedures, its benefits and costs for participants and clients, and a range of similar issues can also indicate issues the researcher should think about in observing and making sense of what is observed.

That interviewing can help indicate where and when to observe, as well as what to attend to in observing, is hardly a unique idea. The point here, however, is that from the ethnographic perspective interview information can only serve as a guide --it cannot be treated as study data-- unless and until it is tied to phenomena which are observed in naturally occurring events and related functionally to the program. This follows from the ethnographer's interest in the functional relationships among aspects of participants' culture(s) and program activities and from the view of interview remarks as situated accounts.

Interviews to explicate what is observed. This second major role interviewing can play in a practical study following the ethnographic orientation is by far the more important. The ethnographer following our theory, as noted earlier, takes the position that group members display their sociocultural standards (or social realities) in interaction: they

continually inform one another in their verbal and nonverbal behavior about their situation-specific social purposes and about "what is going on now, what the 'rules' are, and what the context is" (Erickson, 1978:6). Nevertheless, everything that is going on from participants' perspectives cannot be taken as unequivocally apparent in their interaction. In any case, the ethnographer wants to check his behavior-based analyses with those doing the acting in order to approximate an emic description of the action observed. Thus, the greatest part of the ethnographic inquirer's interviewing would be undertaken to elicit participants' descriptions and explanations of the program-relevant interactions in which they routinely engaged. A usual strategy for obtaining such information is to ask people to talk about what they are doing as they are doing it or as soon as possible thereafter. Often, too, ethnographers use an audiovisual record of an event to help participants recall during interviews what they were doing and thinking during the interaction recorded (e.g., Dorr-Bremme, 1982; Erickson and Shultz, 1982). The ethnographer assumes that bringing the interview to the naturally occurring interactional scene (or, in the latter case, bringing the interactional scene to the interview) helps provide access to the beliefs, values, and ideas; the context-specific rules for interpretation and action, etc. that participants were actually using to construct the observed event. The goal is not only to capture participants' interpretations and intents while they are still fresh in participants' minds. More importantly, it is to help the respondent sustain the naturally occurring context as the salient interpretive frame: to facilitate the respondent's ability to report on action and thought in terms of the everyday interactional scene rather than in terms of the interview context.

Principle #3: Treat the Program's Definition and Boundaries as Problematic

Oriented by the theory of social relations in the last chapter, an ethnographer embarking on a practical inquiry would treat the definition and boundaries of the program or other endeavor to be studied as problematic. He or she would make participants' interpretations of "the program" a central matter during inquiry.

There are several elements of the theory that I have presented which motivate this principle of inquiry design. First and most basically, the constitutive theory assumes that participants in social endeavors take action in light of their interpretations of "who we are and what we are doing now" at several hierarchical levels, e.g., at this moment in this situation in this event during this phase of this program. It follows that as participants go about addressing the program, their interpretations of the program's rationale, goals, emphases, requirements and optional features, etc., will influence their sense of what is going on and of what role they are expected to assume at the moment. These interpretations, then, will influence participants' action choices and so the program's overall enactment. Thus, from a constitutive ethnographic perspective, participants' interpretations of the program are likely to be a main factor in how the program is actually shaped at particular sites.

Second, that participants must interpret the program (or other social endeavor) is taken as given from the viewpoint of our theory. It is true that nearly every program is defined and explained in a variety of documents: enabling legislation, administrative guidelines, "how-to" booklets, curriculum objectives and materials, and/or others. In addition, participants at particular programs in face-to-face briefings with experts of various kinds. But as is the case with all symbolic forms, the language of these

sources is indexical, inherently incomplete.[2] None of them is, nor are all collectively, a complete script for assembling and maintaining the program from moment to moment. Those who are to enact the program as part of their daily lives, therefore, must draw upon their cultural knowledge and personal experience in order to determine, first, which available documents and which briefings merit greatest attention and, next, exactly what the words they contain mean for action "here and now."[3]

The ethnographer, then, should treat definitions of the program inherent in documents, in briefings by program experts, and in the interview accounts of participants as situated, indexical, and open to interpretation as part of the normal, natural course of social affairs. He or she should approach these accounts as data. In so doing, his or her primary interest should not be in whether participants' at a particular site had arrived at a "correct" understanding of the program. Instead, the ethnographer should be concerned with how the interpretation(s) apparent at this site had been achieved and how they functioned in the program's enactment. Furthermore, he or she should seek local interpretations of the program <u>in situated interaction</u>, turning to interviews only as a way of obtaining elaboration on what was observed. And recognizing the reciprocal, "reflexive" nature of participants' interpretations and actions, the constitutive ethnographer would consider

2. The concept of indexicality is defined and explained on pages 44-45 above.

3. Dorr-Bremme, et al., 1979, offer a detailed description of how the documents and briefings provided in definition and support of one program offered very different definitions of that program at various moments in time (e.g., in the same year) as well as through time (from one year to another). This account also analyzes some systematically different ways in which the same program was interpreted and enacted at various schools sites.

participants' interpretations of the program and their enactments of it as likely to be dynamic, rather than static. Thus, he/she should keep an eye out for evolution in participants' conceptualization and performance of the program over time.

Principle #4: Center Inquiry on Interactional Events

This is a principle of specific inquiry tactics. It entails guidelines for sequencing and focusing inquiry during the course of an evaluation.

From the perspective of the theory we are using, social life is organized at various hierarchical levels. The single communicative moves of individuals are juxtaposed in a variety of ordered ways in interactional exchanges (e.g., questions and answers, conversational "points" and listening responses). Exchanges are strung together in sequences that comprise social situations within events or occasions (e.g., the elicitation-response-evaluation sequences that comprise teaching interactions, Dorr-Bremme, 1982; Mehan, 1979). Sets of sequences, organized in certain ways, constitute recognizable kinds of social events --legislative sessions, phone calls, meetings, classroom lessons, other "service-delivery" transactions. Ultimately, sets of events enacted simultaneously in various locations and sequenced in various ways constitute what comes to be glossed as "the program" itself. And to reiterate a key point: as persons carry out these interactions and sets of interactions and so "construct" or "accomplish" the program in question, they are drawing constantly upon their sociocultural knowledge. Their actions are based in their systems of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating, and acting; their "maps" of kind of people, actions, contexts,

and things; their notions of the relationships that obtain among the latter, and so on.

Thus, as the ethnographer undertakes a practical study in evaluation, he/she is faced with two fundamental questions: (1) What level of social organization should I concentrate upon in conducting my observation and interviewing? And (2) Aside from participants' interpretations of the program itself, what elements of paticipants'culture(s) (or social realities) should figure in my inquiry?

Ethnographers operating from the theory I presented earlier usually resolve both these questions by centering inquiry upon whole events then proceeding "up" and/or "down" to hierarchically higher and lower levels of social organization (and the aspects of culture they entail) in order to examine and explicate elements of culture that influence how the events taken as central are accomplished.

This tactic has two distinct advantages. First, "events" are salient for participants and readily locatable in their terms. Members of social groups usually have names for units of social life at this level of social organization: legislative briefing, parent advisory council meeting, staff development session, program review debriefing, etc. They can easily direct the inquirer to events of this sort, and they can offer general accounts of what they are "about." The boundaries of larger and smaller "chunks" of social life are often difficult for participants to identify and agree upon, and emic labels and descriptors for them are usually less precise than the investigator would like. Second, and more importantly, concentrating on events serves to focus inquiry at an "intermediate" level of social organization. As the investigator observes these events and interviews participants about them in the ways described above, she/he

obtains information on which other aspects of culture and levels of social ordering seem functionally relevant to the events' enactment. He/she can then study these and explicate the relations of function.

An example will help clarify this process. In the evaluation of the California school program mentioned briefly above, observation focused upon site council planning meetings and upon informal decision-making encounters that routinely occurred between these formal meetings. Parents were allocated seats on the site council at each school by law, and everyone concerned with the program interpreted "parent involvement" as a main program goal. Nevertheless, parents were rarely present during the informal encounters in which program decisions were substantially made, and they played only a minor role in site council discussions. All this suggested the need to explore the general social organization of parent-school relationships, i.e., at a broader hierarchical level. It also suggested the need to examine the social organization of discourse at a more fine-grained level within the meetings, in order to understand how the role of parents and others in the event were situationally produced. Findings from the former line of inquiry illuminated how parents' and staff members' beliefs about societal roles became enacted in some broad institutional arrangements --arrangements that inadvertently but systematically deterred parent involvement in the program. The latter line of ethnographic/sociolinguistic inquiry surfaced ways in which staff members' lexicons and interactional strategies during the formal meetings functioned (again inadvertantly) to discourage and subordinate the participation of those parents who did turn out for program meetings. Each set of findings had clear implications for program management and the delivery of program support services by the state education agency.

In summary, the general tactic in a practical field study following the ethnographic orientation should be to center inquiry on events and then to move outward from events as the data seem to dictate: either "up" to layers of culture and social organization in which the central events are embedded and/or "down" to levels of ordering within the event(s), tracing relationships of function across various levels.

The General Steps Of Practical, Ethnographic Fieldwork

Through the next several chapters, I will take you step by step through the strategies of practical fieldwork from an ethnographic perspective. A brief overview of these steps will be useful to you before you encounter these steps one at a time. I list these steps here.

Step 1: Defining the Purpose(s) and Questions of the Investigation.

Step 2: Gathering Background Information.

Step 3: Selecting Sites.

Step 4: Clarifying Initial Assumptions and Hunches.

Step 5: Entering the Sites.

- Presenting the purposes of the study.
- Establishing an initial identity.
- Negotiating groundrules for operating on site.
- Identifying key informants.

Step 6: Working Ethnographically on Site.

- Ethnographic Observation
- Interviewing
- Synthesizing and Interpreting

Step 7: Leaving the Sites: Closure.

Step 8: Conducting the Overall Analysis.

Step 9: Writing the Report.

CHAPTER 6

THE INITIAL STEPS OF ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK

In this chapter, I briefly describe the first steps of ethnographic inquiry and offer some tips for successfully accomplishing each.

Step 1: Defining The Purpose(s) And Questions of the Investigation

One often hears it said, "Ethnographers allow their research questions to emerge from the site", or "Ethnographers enter the field with an open mind." Neither statement is entirely correct. Ethnographers always begin with at least some general questions in mind. Usually, too, they have some notions about what they want to do with their research once it is completed.

Most of the fieldwork you are likely to do will be aimed toward the specific information needs of an organization or agency. As is the case prior to any research endeavor, it is important for you to understand those needs as thoroughly as possible. Knowing the kinds of purposes to which the information will be put is also critical, as is knowing whether further research is likely to follow the present effort.

I find that I often <u>think</u> I fully understand the intended purposes of the research after a brief conversation or two with the "client." But almost always, further questioning and discussion reveals important details. <u>My advice is, even though you have been briefed and even if you are a member of the organization undertaking the inquiry, be sure to conduct a thorough examination of the purposes underlying fieldwork that you are asked to do.</u>

Take time to specify carefully and precisely the broad questions your data will need to address. (These will follow, at least in part, from the study's purposes.) In the field, you are likely to become absorbed with the many issues, details, and questions that emerge from the site(s). Precisely focused initial questions serve as an important guide in deciding which among these are worthy of further attention. In the end, precisely focused questions will help you sort your data and decide what to include in your report. (You will always have gathered more data than you can possibly include.)

Precisely focused initial questions do not preclude new and more refined questions and issues to emerge on site. Working ethnographically, you will remain open to new questions--ones which may direct you to re-focus those you began with or which suggest directions for further reserch later on. And, you will identify more specific questions, as you collect data, that will lead to answering those you posed in beginning the present research.

In Beginning, Ask Yourself:

1. What are the purposes of this study as stated by primary client/audience? Do I fully understand them?
2. What are the information needs of the client/audience?
3. What will be done with study results? What decisions need to be informed by this research?

4. What are the political concerns that bear upon the study?

5. Now that I have stated the questions, are they worded precisely, clearly, in line with study purposes? (Have others review them?)

6. Can I actually answer these questions definitively in the time alotted and with the resources allocated? (This judgment comes with experiences in fieldwork.)

7. Who are the other audiences of the study? What are their information needs? (Others, in addition to the primary client, may see and make use of your work.)

Step 2: Gathering Background Information

Background information may take many forms. The information you need to gather depends upon the research at hand. Generally, the purposes of gathering background information are straightforward: understanding details of the program or operations to be studied, factors to consider in site selection, becoming familiar with the settings in which you will work, etc.

EXAMPLE

> In the study of Title I schools that I mentioned in Chapter 2, nine schools were identified with median sixth-grade reading scores above the 50th percentile. I felt I needed information on transiency rates, ethnic characteristics of the student bodies, changes in these demographic statistics over time, and data on changes in sixth-grade median reading scores over time. Later on, I also realized that it would be helpful to have longitudinal data on the sixth-graders' scores, as well as a record of changes in scores of other grade-levels from year to year.
>
> I gathered added information on the nine school communities by driving through the neighborhoods each served. (I wanted a visual impression of what their poverty rankings "meant.")

> I also learned about recurrent anomalies in the standardized test scores used by the district to identify the schools (e.g., first grade scores tend to be higher), how poverty ranking is calculated, etc.
>
> All this information helped me in site selection. It also served as general background on the schools ultimately selected.

In other studies, I have consulted program legislation and guidelines, resource materials made available to schools in the programs, etc. In studying a particular set of classrooms, I have visited the school in which they were located in order to "get a feel" for general school schedules and procedures.

As issues emerge on site, additional background information may be needed. For instance, in the middle of the Title I inquiry, I found it essential to check into a special district program for helping schools fund their acquisition of reading materials --a program, of which I learned only after I had entered the schools and begun fieldwork.

Step 3: Selecting Sites

Traditionally, ethnographers have worked in a single site that suits the purposes of their research. They study the life, or some aspect of the life, of participants in that setting. Most often,

however, you will be engaged in studying activities that go on in many sites or settings within a site. You will probably want to know about those activities (e.g., programs) in general; you will be less interested in their enactment in one setting. When such is the case, the problem of site selection arises.

Fieldwork -- especially fieldwork that is ethnographic in nature -- can rarely be conducted in more than a few sites in any one study. (It is, as I pointed out in Chapter 2, labor-intensive and expensive; resources for studying a large number of sites are rarely available.) The "trick," then, is to choose sites that are in some way(s) "typical" or "paradigmatic": those that are exemplars of particular categories. Random sampling is out of the question.

How to select sites that are exemplars of recognizable types is best described by example.

EXAMPLE

> For the Title I study I mentioned earlier, nine schools were identified as having the attributes worthy of study--higher scores. I had to select from among those nine, it seemed.
>
> The nine schools seemed, based on background information, to be of three general types: (1) school where 6th grade scores had been relatively high (in the context of Title I schools) for some time; (2) schools where the scores had suddenly increased but where community SES had also increased; (3) schools where scores had risen gradually but where community SES had gradually declined.
>
> Given time and resources, I judged that I could visit a maximum number of four schools.
>
> Community SES (as indexed by district poverty ranking) was, in light of educational research, deemed to be a strong potentially "causal" factor of higher reading scores. I wanted to try to "control" for SES.

Given the question of the study, therefore, I chose:

(1) Two schools in which scores had been relatively high for a number of years;

(2) Two school in which scores had gradually risen while SES had gradually declined.

(3) Schools which included both largely English-speaking students and schools in which English was the second language for most students.

Ideally, then, assuming that within-school factors could be at least partially responsible for higher score would afford a look at:

(a) Schools in which something potentially effective had been going on for some time (i.e., yielding consistently more positive results).

Perhaps I could learn from their longer experience.

(b) Schools which managed to be effective despite (or so research by Coleman, Jencks, etc. would indicate) conditions which seem increasingly to work against success.

Perhaps I could identify what they had begun to do differently/what had changed.

Schools where scores had "jumped" recently and dramatically might offer a look at immediate changes fresh in staff members' memories--immediate comparisons of a "before" and "after" kind. But in each case these jumps were accompanied by distinct changes upward in SES, along with high transiency rates. It would be difficult to rule out SES as a factor in such settings.

Thus, I chose schools likely to be most propitious for my purposes. (It was desirable, but resources did not allow for, selecting a contrasting set of lower scoring schools. Such schools were visited, however, in a subsequent study.)

This example suggests the kinds of general considerations you should take into account in site selection for ethnographic studies of the applied type you are likely to pursue.

In Selecting Sites, Ask Yourself:

1. What are the factors that bear upon the program(s) or activity(-ies) to be studied--that are likely to influence that program, that activity?

2. Do those factors cluster in different sites in different ways, resulting in some general categories of sites?

3. What are those categories of sites? Which are the most "typical" of all in the population? (For instance, which categories include most of the students, most of the program dollars; how many sites fall in each category; which represent the "extremes" of the phenomenon; etc.)

4. Which categories will allow me to generate the most useful information, given the purposes and questions of the study?

5. Given time and other resources, how many sites can I visit, all told, and obtain sufficient data?

   How many categories can I choose from?

   IT IS BEST TO CHOOSE MORE THAN ONE SITE FROM EACH CATEGORY, IN ORDER TO ABSTRACT OUT MORE CLEARLY WHAT HAD TO DO WITH THE PROGRAM FROM WHAT HAS TO DO WITH CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SITE.

Step 4: Clarifying Initial Assumptions And Hunches

Before the ethnographer enters the field, his/her assumptions and hunches about the issues under study have begun to influence the research. They have influenced the selection of background data to examine. They have come to play in specifying criteria for site selection. These assumptions and hunches will come into play again soon. During the first site visit(s), they will guide what to pay attention to and record in field notes. They will screen how those notes are analyzed and interpreted, and what issues are identified to

examine in further data gathering. In short, the assumptions and hunches that the ethnographer has in mind at the outset influence--and can bias--the entire course of the investigation.

Now is the time, therefore, for you to sit down and reflect critically upon your assumptions and hunches about the issues you are about to study. Do this before you contact the sites you have selected and begin to collect data. If you discover that your preconceptions are limited, you can still go back and revise your site-selection procedure. And in any case, you will want to have your initial assumptions and hunches on record so that you can evaluate--through the course of the study and in final data analysis--how these assumptions and hunches have influenced your data and findings.

You cannot possibly catalogue all the assumptions which are likely to influence your study. There are too many. Your knowledge of research findings, psychological theories, sociological data, and experience in the kinds of settings to be studied may all come into play in your assumptions. So, too, may your beliefs about human nature, how organizations such as schools and districts operate, and about the nature of cultural groups and income groups. Your opinions about the value of the activities or program or other body of activity under study will also bear on your assumptions. Review these in your mind. Note down those which seem to you to predominate your thinking (e.g., those on which you operated in selecting background data, in choosing sites). Then try to list your hunches--the answers to your research questions (if any) that you find yourself anticipating.

I have trouble doing this on my own. I know it is important, but I find it time-consuming, difficult to get down to work on. To counteract my tendency to put this off, I usually do it with someone else. I talk through my ideas about the study with someone generally familiar with education. Often, I talk to several others. Their viewpoints help me expand my own. Their remarks help me identify assumptions and biases. During and after such a talk, I take notes on my thoughts and those of others that I have spoken with. This serves the purpose. I check back on these notes throughout the study in order to evaluate how my preconceptions may be limiting my inquiry.

My final notes on assumptions and hunches at the outset of the Title I study that I have been using as an example in this section looked something like this:

EXAMPLE

Assumptions: Think the test scores may not show real reading achievement--teachers may know better.

Can't believe it's all SES--after all, these aren't the wealthiest Title I communities: correlation isn't perfect.

Assumptions: My guess is it'll be something different at each site--ineffable factors (morale, attitude) in school and in community may matter alot.

Even if it's not something different at each site, it's likely to be a multiplicity of factors at any one site. Don't imagine "doing better at reading instruction" (if these schools really are) is "caused" by any one thing.

I don't know anything about reading. What are the better ways to teach reading, anyway?

Participants are likely to supply me with a whole boatload of reasons for why their school has higher scores--but I wonder what the difference would be (or would there be a difference?) if they didn't know

purposes of the research? Would my findings be more valid? (Supposedly, and yet...)

(NOTE: Here, I wrote my assumptions and hunches together. The list continues with several more entries, as above.)

In Reflecting On Your Assumptions & Hunches, Ask Yourself:

1. In thinking about this problem up to now, what kinds of factors/variables have I been considering? What criteria have I used (am I thinking about) for choosing sites?

2. What are my worries about this study? What do these tell me about my initial hunches? (For example "I'm worried I won't find anything because... each site is likely to be very different OR ...because there will be too many factors to focus on. OR AGAIN, "I'm worried about this study because I'm afraid I don't find anything--the program isn't working.)

3. What are all the theories, philosophies, research findings that I'm aware of and which bear upon this study? What assumptions do they make? What hunches (hypotheses) do they suggest? Am I considering all the possibilities?

4. What relevant biases do I have? (For example, "I always thought the Houghton-Mifflin series was too hard when I was teaching. I really prefer the old Bank Street readers." OR "I think inner city kids need plenty of skills drill." OR "I think schools that are successful in any area always owe their success to good, strong, leadership." OR "I know the schools in my area of the city are doing better than the schools in area X." OR "Everybody knows Asian students do better" etc.)

Step 5: Entering The Sites

In the jargon of ethnography, "entering a site" refers to the first day(s) in the field, during which the researcher

(1) informs those in the research setting of the purposes of the research (and wins their initial consent to participate);

(2) establishes an initial identity among persons in the research setting;

(3) negotiates groundrules for operating in the setting (explicitly and/or implicitly) with persons in the setting;

(4) begins to identify key informants and settings in which to observe participants' behavior.

I discuss each of these objectives of early site visits in the paragraphs below.

Presenting the purposes of the study. Explaining your presence is unavoidable in any research setting. (Those in the setting are curious; they have a right to an explanation; ethically, you have an obligation to give one.) Generally, ethnographers try to win the informed consent of site participants. That is, they explain the purposes of the study, what participation will require of site "residents," what uses will be made of the data, how they will assure anonymity (or why they cannot), etc. They, they ask whether those who work or reside in the setting will consent to participate in the study.

In many (if not most instances), the organization or agency for which you are working will require that certain sites admit you for the purposes of conducting a particular study. Alternatively, organization or agency administrators will "negotiate" participation with those at local sites. Nevertheless, you should take care upon first visiting a site to provide an explanation of the study that you are conducting. This explanation should be honest and persuasive. Even when there is considerable pressure from the central office for local leadership and staff to "go along," they may not cooperate whole-heartedly with your work. An enthusiastic, persuasive presentation may help to win fuller cooperation; thus, it can facilitate your work.

I usually include the following in my explanations:

- brief "historical background": how the study came about, why it's being done
- main issues or research questions (and sometimes, why these are of interest)
- what I'm going to be doing (who I'll talk to, whether I'll be dropping in on classes or offices, etc.)
- the categories of persons in the setting who will be involved and how much time they'll be expected to donate to the research effort
- how participants in the setting will be able to get some "feedback" on the topic of the study; e.g., the report will be available, you'll be able to see how other sites are doing the program, how your branch, school or ward compares with others, etc.
- the general value of the project to others; who will benefit or be helped (e.g., other teachers in schools like yours)
- guarantees (or lack of same) for confidentiality and anonymity
- an invitation to answer any questions

WHETHER THE EXACT PURPOSES OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT SHOULD BE EXPLAINED (AND AT WHAT LEVEL OF DETAIL) IS A MATTER OF ETHICS AND A METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATION. Ethically, it is never appropriate to misrepresent the purposes or questions of a study. But it is sometimes methodologically desirable to give a more general explanation of the research. Here is why.

In ethnographic fieldwork, the researcher wants to get in touch with what site participants do, say, think, and feel in their everyday lives. Thus, in conducting the study, the researcher strives to alter the site as little as possible. Defining the purposes of the research fully and exactly can sometimes alter how participants naturally act, speak, think, and feel. (Consider what your organization, agency or school does or would do to prepare for an evaluation site visit by a funding agency.)

As an example, consider the Title I project that I have been alluding to. Identifying the schools as "successful," I sensed, clearly altered the way participants felt about themselves and their reading program. It became impossible for me to know what morale was like in the schools before they were told they were successful. To ascertain their own, independent assessments of their schools and their reading programs became difficult. Identification of the study as one of "successful schools" may well have made some participants feel that there was no interest in the weaknesses that they perceived in their programs. Of course, I did ask teachers whether their identification as "successful" influenced anything at the school, and if so, what. But I became dependent on their self-reports: I could never see or hear directly, in naturally occurring circumstances, what their evaluations of their programs were like before the study, what morale was like before the study, etc. Methodological considerations

had to give way to practical ones. It was the end of the year. Teachers were busy with testing and with preparations for the close of school. I'm sure that the staff members who were generally highly cooperative would have been less so if a more general or broad description of the research had been given, e.g., "The district and UCLA are working together to look at the kinds of reading programs that are going on in city schools"; or, "I'm helping the district 'get a feel' for the different ways reading is being taught in order to prepare for a study later on that will work to identify more successful and less successful instructional set-ups." (Note: Both explanations would be basically honest and true--if one does not place a great deal of weight on sins of omission.)

Establishing an initial identity. Participants in fieldwork studies often want to know "who" the researcher is and what qualifies him/her to "come poke around in our school." Staff members are often worried that the researcher "will not understand" the historical, contextual, and other circumstances that make the actions of those "on the front line" practice understandable as sensible and "correct."

Much rapport can be gained by giving a bit of personal background. I usually try to do so in a low-key way at an appropriate moment. Often, it can be valuable, if not done ostentatiously, to mention whatever experience you might have in roles that are like those of the people you are studying. This can give them a sense that they can trust you, that you know how things are for them.

Every action that the fieldwork researcher takes on site contributes to his/her unfolding identity in the eyes of

participants. In the long run, what the researcher says about himself/herself is less important that what he/she does. But in the beginning, a bit of personal introduction can help participants locate what kind of person you are.

Negotiating ground rules for operating on site. This is usually done with the local site administrator or someone that he/she designates. I recommend the following:

- Let the administrator or her/his designee know that you're willing to respect his preferences (or, as appropriate, that you are willing to accept his/her guidelines on some things, but that others are mandated by the central office people who have asked you to do the study).

- Describe how you'd like to work, indicating a sensitivity to usual organizational concerns and exigencies as you do so: e.g., "I'd like to be able to drop in on classes without appointments, but I know some teachers would like a warning. Maybe you can introduce me to the staff as a whole, indicate my wish to drop in, then have teachers who want advance warning let us know."

- Elicit the administrator's reactions to your suggestions and respond cooperatively to constraints he/she proposes. (Such constraints cannot, however, include such things as only speaking with staff members the administrator selects or other limitations that influence the study's validity.)

Identifying key informants Key informants are those at the site who are likely to have important information and/or the ability to introduce you to others in the setting with whom you'll need to speak. In the Title I project, for instance, reading coordinators

were key informants in three of the schools. In the fourth, the reading specialist seemed to have less information on classroom reading teaching and less rapport with classroom teachers. There, the principal served as the primary informant.

It is important to identify the key informants and get to know them as soon as possible. Delays result if you do not do so: access to others on site remains limited; your work suffers from the lack of a broad perspective, etc.

Key settings, of course, are those (a) where action relevant to your study takes place, and (b) where action in general takes place at the site. In the Title I study, classrooms, reading labs, and resource retrieval rooms were key settings where action germane to study questions took place.

When you have completed the five preliminary steps discussed in this chapter, you are ready to begin the most essential aspects of ethnographic fieldwork: gathering data through ethnographic observation and interviewing, recording the data in field notes, synthesizing and reflecting on that data in order to identify emerging patterns and themes, formulating new and revised questions and developing some hunches to test out, and returning to the site to collect data to address your questions and hunches. I describe some guidelines for carrying out these steps successfully in the next three chapters.

CHAPTER 7

ETHNOGRAPHIC OBSERVATION

Observing naturally occurring social activity is the core of ethnographic fieldwork. And to make your observation truly ethnographic, your looking and seeing should always be done through the lens of the ethnographic orientation.

Observing Ethnographically

Observing from the ethnographic orientation requires that you adopt the frame of reference of the proverbial man from Mars -- or at least of an anthropologist studying an unfamiliar culture. The idea is to approach what in fact may be very familiar as strange and new. Only by assuming this mental stance can you begin to get inside the social reality of participants in the setting you are studying, understand and describe it, and explain participants' actions in terms of it.

As I suggested in an earlier chapter, most of us act as positivists as we go about our everyday lives. We see things and act toward them exactly as they seem to us to be. Most of the time, too, we assume without giving it much thought that others around us see the world pretty much as we do. Of course we know that our neighbors, colleagues, friends, and so on sometimes have opinions, values, and beliefs that are different than ours. We recognize that they may have more detailed knowledge about certain things than we do. But we hardly ever inquire systematically into their systems of knowledge and

belief; we rarely question them about their standards for interpreting others' actions and choosing actions that they consider appropriate; and we generally take it for granted that their notions of reality and meaning are roughly the same as our own.

From this positivist orientation, as I said, we see and describe things as we know them to be. Spending a day in a school, for example, some observers-in-training noticed activities such as "a teacher introducing a new concept," "the principal supervising a teacher," "a class getting ready for recess," "a grade-level meeting planning for team teaching," and "the office staff hard at work recording attendance." Pressed for a more detailed account of a classroom scene, the observer familiar with the culture of elementary schooling might respond as follows:

> The teacher was using a phonics approach as she helped students with their decoding skills. She circulated, answering questions and reinforcing what she had taught as students did their follow-up seatwork.

In fact, a former teacher, now a researcher in her school district, described a brief visit to an elementary classroom in exactly these words. For her, it was perfectly apparent that this was, as she told me, "what I saw going on." Her researcher colleagues, all former elementary teachers themselves, found that these words evoked a clear picture of what the class observed was doing.

These accounts -- the earlier, briefer ones and the more detailed on just above -- illustrate the way in which we see and describe as everyday positivists. As competent members of our cultures, we know what things mean and we usually see and recount them in terms of their

meaning. This is true of all the accounts above. None of them actually describes what people in the scenes observed were literally doing or saying. All of them are in fact interpretations of the behaviors observed. Each reports an observer's judgments regarding the meaning of participants' actions.

This may not be evident at first. (It certainly was not to those who offered these accounts, all of whom were experienced as teachers but beginners at ethnographic observation.) At a glance, only one phrase suggests itself as an interpretive judgment, the one which notes the office staff as being "hard at work." But closer inspection reveals that each account interprets by ascribing meaning to behavior that occurred, attributing purpose or intent to the persons doing the behaving, and/or making inferences about the functional relevance of what was happening. Interpretations of this kind come through in the verbs "introducing," "supervising," "getting ready for," "planning," "helping," and "reinforcing." Several of the accounts also involve interpretations of another similar (but perhaps more subtle) type: they interpret by classifying actions or things in particular categories. Interpretations of this sort appear in the nouns "concept," "grade-level meeting," "teaming teaching," "phonics approach," and "follow-up seatwork." From my session with the neophyte fieldworkers who used these terms I know that participants in the activities observed did not use these terms, at least not while the observers were watching them. Nor did the observers have previous evidence that the people they were watching routinely used these

labels to characterize the actions and things in question. In short, they were part of the observers' reality; whether participants understood what they were doing in these terms (or in terms of the verbs quoted earlier) remained unknown pending further investigation.

Now, the issue here is not the accuracy or validity of the "descriptive" terminology. The point is that the observers literally saw things in the terms described. In effect, they looked right through the actual behavior and immediately "saw" meaning, the meaning it had for them. Put another way, the meanings of the actions and things that they observed were, from their point of view immediately obvious, self-evident, unproblematic. Consider the following quotations, offered by the observers in defense of their interpretive choices during our training session:

> But the principal was supervising the teacher. What else would he be doing, sitting in the back of the room, watching the teacher and taking notes?
>
> You know when a teacher is introducing something new to a class. You can just tell, from the way they present the material. You get to know how teaching is sequenced and you can tell whether they're introducing a concept or skill, developing it, reviewing it, or whatever.
>
> Anybody who knows anything about teaching reading can recognize the phonics approach.

All of these statements illustrate that the observers-in-training "saw" in terms of meanings which were for them self-evident. The statements also reveal something about the interpretive process the

observers unselfconsciously used. They drew on their cultural knowledge and normative experience as elementary-school educators and, in effect, said to themselves "these behaviors in this context typically add up to what we elementary educators know as ..." supervising a teacher or introducing a lesson or using the phonics approach, etc. This is the everyday positivist mindset at work, recognizing things as what "everyone" knows them to be.

This way of looking and knowing works well for us in everyday life. We can not afford to spend our time pondering what things "really" mean by what they are doing. But this everyday positivism is a serious disadvantage in ethnographic observation. As an ethnographic evaluator, you want to know how participants are assembling the special program or routine operations you are studying. In order to do that, you need to know how things look to participants, what purposes they have in mind as they act, and how their actions and sets of actions actually function in relation to one another. If your accounts of events are built from the first upon <u>your</u> inferences and interpretations about what participants are intending and how their actions are functioning, your study can never achieve these goals. And the larger your inferential "leaps" from actual behavior to interpreted meaning, the further away your study moves from participants' social relatives. The examples I have given here involve rather low-level inferences; the distance from observed actions and talk to the interpretation is relatively small. Untrained observers rarely limit themselves to these kind of low-inference

statements, however. The following illustrate observations that are much more interpretive.

> The physical plant was well-maintained and teachers had tried to brighten the dingey corridors with samples of students' best art work.
>
> Staff morale in the school was extremely low.
>
> The principal's dynamic style of leadership kept all the staff attentive and involved in the faculty meeting, even though it was late in the afternoon and everyone was extremely tired.

Each of these accounts was written by observers familiar with schools but with no previous training in ethnographic observation. None of them was supported by any description of behavior; none was informed by interviews with participants or by participants' naturally occurring remarks. Such accounts are troublesome not only because they do not necessarily capture the social realities known to and experienced by participants, but also because they deprive the data record of the literal description needed to support generalizations and to communicate clearly and precisely to those who will read the report.

In order to do ethnographic observation, then, you must learn to slow down the positivistic interpretive processes you routinely use in everyday life. In order to do so, you need to focus on what the people you are observing are literally doing and saying from moment to moment. At the same time, you must suspend judgment regarding what their words and actions mean, what has motivated them, etc. Your interpretations regarding meaning can serve as hunches, but you must learn to check these hunches out in later observations and in formal

or informal interviews with participants in the scenes you have observed. Futhermore, as you concentrate upon and record actual behavior, you should work to keep in mind such questions as: What is going on here from participants' point of view? What is the context "now," so far as participants are concerned? Toward what social purposes are participants' actions directed? As they interact, what are participants explicitly and implicitly telling one another about the system(s) of standards they are using for perceiving, believing, evaluating, and choosing actions? What sociocultural knowledge and beliefs appear to be informing participants' actions? Clinical training in ethnographic observation should help you to learn and practice these skills.

Focusing Observation

Where you observe, when you observe, and what you observe are issues that you must decide based upon <u>why</u> you are observing. In practice, these decisions must also be made taking into account the general nature and scope of the program or other social activity you are studying; the overarching questions your evaluation or study must address: the time and financial support available on given days and at given hours. Thus, a booklet such as this one, cannot tell you exactly how best to design your observational effort or allocate your observational time for any specific study. I offer some general guidelines below for doing these things, but you should bear in mind that there can be situational exceptions even to these "rules of thumb."

1. Begin by focusing your observing on the recurrent events that are most central or essential to the program or operations under the study.

This recapitulates a suggestion I made earlier in discussing some general guidelines for ethnographic inquiry.

In determining which events (or other scenes) are most central or essential, rely on the judgment of local program participants who are most likely to be well-informed. If your judgments conflict with theirs and you have the time and other resources, do some preliminary observation of both the scenes participants recommend and those you are inclined to choose. If you cannot practically do this, trust participants' views. Remember, your objective is to understand and describe the program (at lease initially) as participants see it.

Think in functional terms as, with participants' guidance, you determine which recurrent events or scenes are most central. Keep in mind that the events or scenes or contexts in which important activity is supposed to be happening are not always those where it is happening. If key informants in the setting direct you to events or scenes that are not functionally central or essential, do not be reluctant to abandon observation of these in favor of others where the real actions is located. But in so doing: (1) continue to elicit the help of participants in locating functionally central events or scenes; (2) remember that participants can give you this help indirectly; what they say and do in naturally occurring circumstances can point the way to the program events that are in actuality most important; and (3) be sure to examine how it has happened and what it

means that participants have directed you to a recurrent event or scene that appears to have little or no functional role in the enactment of the overall program or other endeavor you are studying. (Ask yourself: Could I be mistaken in judging this event or scene as functionally irrelevant? Why have presumably well-informed participants repeatedly mentioned this recurrent scene as important?)

Recurrent events or scenes that are likely to be functionally central in most social programs or social-service organizations are those in which major policy or planning decisions are routinely made and those in which services are regularly delivered to clients.

2. Let observation of functionally central events direct you toward what to observe (and, more generally, what to inquire about) next.

As you watch participants' naturally occurring behavior in central program events and scenes, be alert to what their behavior tells you about other scenes and activities that are important to observe. Note where and when these occur, who participates in them, and what their role or function in the program or organization seems to be. Listen for information on how these scenes are functionally related to the central events you have already begun to observe. Reflect on which of the fundamental questions of your inquiry -- or the specific questions and hunches you have begun to generate -- observation of these "new" events or scenes might help answer. Then based on this information and these reflections, choose some "next most important" events or scenes to begin observing.

Information on what to observe next arises in naturally occurring behavior in a number of ways. Sometimes, it appears quite explicitly in participants' talk with one another. During my study of schools with higher read-test scores, for example, I initially focused observation on reading time in classrooms. As I watched reading teaching in one school, sixth-grade teachers occasionally dropped in one another's classes, and they often spoke of their lunch-time discussions during these visits. They referred in a straightforward manner to the curriculum and student-placement decisions that they made at these informal meetings in the teachers' cafeteria. It was evident that I needed to observe their noon-hour sessions in order to understand their instructional decision-making. Yet, as important and helpful as seeing these meetings turned out to be, no one had though to mention them when I asked about where and when planning for the teaching of reading usually went on.

In other instances, clues about what else to observe are less obvious. Reviewing my notes from another school in the reading study, I began to recognize that in this particular school instructional aides played a big role in teaching reading. I also found myself noting that the aides' teaching strategies seemed on the whole relatively more sophisticated than those of aides in other, similar schools that I had visited. I had heard earlier from two or three teachers that the school had an in-service training program for aides. Now, in view of the accumulating data from classroom observation, it seemed that this program might be a critical factor in

the school's reading program. I decided to observe one or two of these in-service sessions for aides. (I also decided to interview aides and teachers about the training program and to look into aide training at other schools that were part of the study.)

The point here is that you should build your chain of observations outward from its initial focus on functionally central events. Participants' naturally occurring talk and actions will often provide a variety of kinds of clues -- some quite explicit; others, less so -- for deciding where and when to observe next, and what questions observing these "new" events and scenes are likely to help answer.

3. Observe critical events and observe during critical periods.

If you follow the strategies I've suggested above, you will spend most of your observational time in most evaluations or studies watching types of activities that routinely recur. Recurrent events -- regular meetings, classroom lessons, the admission and treatment of patients, staff-client interviews, and so on -- will nearly always constitute the greater part of, and lie at the heart of, the program or operations you are studying. But in focusing observation on recurrent events and scenes, don't neglect special, one-time-only, or occasionally occurring activities. Be especially alert for non-routine events and occasions that are critical to the success or well-being of the social endeavor at issue. Give these top priority in selecting non-routine activity to observe. (And, of course, if resource limitations force you to choose between observing an instance

of a routine event and observing an especially critical activity that will occur only once or occasionally, e.g., if both occur simultaneously, devote your observational time to the latter.)

Some non-usual activities are important to document because they are likely to influence the life history of the program or organization in critical ways. An example of social activity that can fall in this category is the key-decision-making meeting, e..g., a union or association meeting to consider a job action; a board or sponsoring-agency meeting to vote on the budget or program funding; ad hoc meetings undertaken to decide what to do when a top administrator is unable to continue in his/her post. Other examples include the presentation of findings to staff members by an evaluation or accreditation team, the keynote policy address delivered to staff by a new adminstrator, and the diverse activity accompanying a strike.

When activities of this type arise during the course of your fieldwork, they may or may not immediately appear to be relevant to the questions of your inquiry. If they do, you will of course want to observe them. But even if they seem irrelevant, you will be wise to give them serious consideration in deciding what to observe. It can sometimes turn out later that an event or scene you disregarded as irrelevant has come to influence the phenomena you are studying. Then, you have missed an important piece of the story that you need to tell. Furthermore, if the activity (event or scene) in question is truly critical for the program or organization, participants will soon begin to discuss, analyze, and take positions on that activity and its

consequences. As you encounter these discussions in the course of your fieldwork, they can tell you a great deal about participants' social realities: how they perceive and interpret events, how they ascribe cause and effect, how they array themselves in different groups on major issues; etc. If you have first-hand knowledge of what actually occurred in the key event, you can often draw richer data and inferences from its subsequent discussion -- data and inferences that are relevant to your inquiry questions. Finally, it is worth noting that critical events can sometimes so change routine program or organizational activities that it makes sense only to abandon or drastically change central inquiry questions. Under these circumstances, the most valuable direction continued inquiry can take is often an examination of the change process that has begun to occur. Having observed the activity or event(s) that have set this change process in motion is a significant advantage when these circumstances arise.

There is a second type of critical, non-routine activity than can be extremely valuable to observe and document in field notes. This is the kind of activity that occurs when the program or organization is temporarily operating under, and working to cope with the sources of, pressure or stress.

The sources and kinds of the pressure or stress I have in mind here, as well as the types of activity that they can engender, are many. Some are indicated by the following examples. A foreign dignitary or important government official is paying a visit to the

site; everyone feels it is crucial for things to be spruced up and running smoothly. The building's mechanical systems have suddenly broken down during a busy workday; but service to clients cannot be deferred. A program review team from the funding agency is spending three days in the school; administrators and staff conclude they must show the program at its best. A staff member is suspected of a series of petty thefts; operations must continue despite a climate of suspicion and an on-going investigation. In the middle of the school year, the principal is suddenly transferred; her replacement is an "unknown quantity" to the faculty.

As these examples suggest, some stressful situations you encounter during fieldwork come about with advance warning. You know as soon as participants do that they are in progress, and this allows you to plan at least some of your observational strategies in advance. (You would be able to learn what activities were to be undertaken in preparation for the dignitary's or program review team's visit, for example, as well as the schedules for the visits themselves.) In other instances, you have no time to plan. A pressure situation develops by accident or chance, participants in the setting begin to respond; and you must observe what you can, where you can, following your instincts and training.

Whichever the case, it is nearly always a good idea to capitalize upon such non-ordinary and critical circumstances by observing the events and scenes that begin to unfold. You should give your main attention to those that are undertaken in explicit response to the

pressure situation, especially when the situation and activities are likely to be short term. By observing these, you can often learn much about such matters as the values and beliefs of individuals and the group as a whole, the qualities of leadership and "followership"participants display, the informal social structure, and the degree of adaptability of the organization and its underlying principles. Such information can help you elucidate many kinds of issues that are basic in an ethnographic study. In pressure or stress situations that endure for longer periods, you should also plan to observe the recurrent program or organizational activities you have been focusing on. Are routine procedures disrupted, deflected, or deferred? Are normal operations on course? How efficiently and effectively have efforts been made to keep things running in their usual way? Observing routine operations during critical periods can help you learn a good deal about a program or institution.

A final point: some institutions and programs experience of stress or pressure as a normal part of their usual cycle. It is sometimes useful to focus observation on these periods, especially when you must economize on your observational time. In a recent study of effective and ineffective school-administration practices, our inquiry team found it valuable to devote about 25% of our on-site time for the year to observing the opening of school. During this period just before and just after students arrive in September, the principal and other administrators must orient new teachers, set up registration for new students, handle last-minute scheduling problems that arise

from enrollment changes, see that the building and classrooms are prepared, assign responsibilities to teachers for various co-curricular activities, and accomplish a great variety of other tasks. It is a good time to learn about school organization and leadership. Critical times such as this, can provide an encapsulated look at phenomena of interest. You need to remember, however, not to substitute observation of these special times when your inquiry questions require you to look at daily routines.

4. In observing, (a) Take into account the contexts (or segments) of social life that participants' act in terms of;

   (b) Observe whole units of activity, defining the beginnings and endings in participants terms.

As I mentioned earlier, no one experiences social life as an undifferentiated stream of activity. All of us, as we go through our everyday lives, are aware of changes in context. We have a sense of "times," situations, and activities ending and new ones beginning. We recognize these contexts as divisions or segments of social life at several levels. Some are longer, more enduring, (e.g., "this school year.") Other contexts or segments are nested with these, (e.g., the "beginning," the "middle," and the "end" of the school year); still others within the latter (e..g., the school day, periods within the school day); and so on down to those that last only an instant, (e.g., the "listening-response-relevant moment" that I mentioned in introducing this same idea in the last chapter).

Ethnographic inquiries that you are likely to undertake will probably never be concerned with such small segments of social life as

the latter. But as you plan for and carry out observation in practical fieldwork, you should be aware of the larger contexts or segments of social life that participants in the setting under study routinely recognize and act in terms of. And you should also observe whole events whenever practically possible, using participants' general sense of their beginnings and endings as your guideline.

There is a theoretical and two methodological reasons for following these rules. First, as I have pointed out many times now, your ethnographic objective is to understand and (at least initially) to portray activity in terms of participants socially reality. You cannot do this if you divide up units of time arbitrarily or according to your own notions of when things have begun and ended. Second, if you do not maintain the integrity of participants' sense of context in your observational and documentation you are likely to miss critical aspects of and differences in their routine ways of behaving. The ways participants in any social group deem it appropriate to interpret others behavior and to act themselves vary with features of the situation, as they interpret the situation "now." For example, ways of organizing activity and kinds of activity often vary with the time of the school year, and at another level of context, with the part of the instructional period or lesson. Not only can you miss features of behavior and its organization by ignoring these differences, but you can also be confused by or misinterpret what is going on. Ways of appropriately handling patient calls at the beginning of a shift and near the end of a shift may be quite different. If you are unaware of

this context-specific variation that is salient for "insiders" to the scene, you can find their behavior variable, inconsistent, or unexplainable. If you regularly observe only part of a shift, you can erroneously represent the way calls are handled then as the way they are "always" handled. Third, and most simply, when you observe only part of an event or scene, it is difficult to understand what is going on fully and accurately. Missing the beginning of a meeting, for instance, often means missing the introduction of visitors and new members of the group, the most complete statement of the issues to be discussed, etc. Missing the ending leaves you without information on how the issues were resolved or what will happen next in pursuit of their resolution. And missing the middle means missing important information on participants' roles and group processes.

How can you take account of participants' notions of context in planning observation and in observing? Depending upon the nature and questions of your inquiry, the following ways are helpful.

(a) Early on, interview key participants about their annual, weekly, and/or daily cycles of activity. Listen for and make a record of the "times" or phases of activity that they label. Weigh which of these to see in view of your research questions if you are unable to observe.

(b) Before focusing in on particular units of social activity for extended observation, check with participants to be sure they see these units as part of their reality and inquire about their temporal boundaries. If for instance, you want to watch counselor-student

advisement sessions on post-secondary options, ascertain that such a category of sessions exists for counselors by asking a general question or two such as, "What are some of the kinds of sessions you have with students? What do they tend to be about?"

(c) In early observations, look for emic confirmation or disconfirmation of the rough bondaries you are using to delimit the event or scene. Emic confirmation means indicators in participants' behavior. At the beginnings of contexts or segments, participants usually settle down, assume a general group-wide positioning in their bodily posture and gaze direction, and often make statements that more-or-less describe what is happening or about to happen. ("I guess we'd better begin"; "Our next job is to decide on the budgeting"; "Let's get ready for reading.") At transitions between segments, movement often increases the noise level rises or there is a lull in talking; behavior becomes more individuated, less uniform from person to person. Then, movement decreases and a new group-wide positioning is assumed as the next segment begins. At the endings of relatively large or enduring contexts or segments, there are rather explicit statements about closing the activity; movement increases as people rise, mill about and leave the scene. (To visualize all this, think of behavior at a concert or meeting you have recently attended. For more on emic behavioral indicators of contexts, see Erickson and Shultz, 1981 and Pike, 1967.)

(d) Immediately after you have observed, interview key participants about "what happened." Ask them to take you step-by-step

through the event and explain what was going on from their perspective. Again, listen for the labels or phrases they naturally use to refer to different "times" or events-within-the event. This will help you get in touch with the contexts or segments that participants know to be nested within the event you have observed.

(e) If you are aware or suspect that you have not been able to regularly observe activity throughout the annual or weekly cycle, across contexts within events, etc., use interviews to elicit information on how the activity, events, or pieces of events that you have seen are like and unlike those at other times and in other contexts that you have not been able to observe. (This is a short-cut to be avoided, but the practical contingencies of a study sometimes make it necessary.) In addition, try to keep in mind the context-limited nature of your observations as you identify general patterns, issues, and questions in the process of on-going analysis of your field notes and other data. Also make it a point to inform the audiences of your report about when you did and did not observe and how this may have limited or otherwise influenced your findings.

The general guidelines here all have situational exceptions, but they should help you decide how to focus you observatioanl effort in light of the particular nature and purposes, of your evaluation or study.

The Duration of Observation

One of the questions that beginners in ethnographic fieldwork ask most frequently is, "How many times should I observe something?" When

they ask this question, of course, they are referring to a particular type of recurrent event -- reading lessons, faculty meetings, etc. Generally, too, they mean to be asking about the frequency and/or duration of a particular kind of event in a particular setting, e.g., reading lessons in this teacher's class, faculty meetings at this school, etc.

Questions of "how many" and/or "how many times" are extremely difficult to answer, even by providing general guidelines. They can only be addressed intelligently by taking into account the specifics of the study or evaluation at issue, (purposes questions, audiences, available resources), the nature of the setting in which the inquiry is to be conducted, the total number of settings and types of contexts and types of activities that are relevant to observe, and so on.

Three very general rules may be of some assistance.

1. Select the type of settings in which to observe activities and the number of each type in ways that will encompass all the salient dimensions along which variation is likely to influence the activity to be observed.

In general, take the same approach I recommended earlier for selecting sites as you select settings for observation within sites.

2. Observe instances of each type of event or scene until you have a comprehensive description of the behavioral patterns that routinely constitute that event or scene and have an understanding of how participants interpret or ascribe meaning to those patterns.

In other words, observe recurrent events until you can describe how the scene is organized and how particpants' routinely, systematically describe what is going on. A signal that you have

reached this point is that you find you are able to predict behavioral sequences accurately a high proportion of the time and to predict with similar accuracy how participants will describe what went on (i.e., in post-event interviews.) This does not include being able to predict the "content" of individuals' remarks or the topics addressed by the group. (These will vary over time.) It means being able to produce a rough model or grammar of how the event is organized, one that is meaningful in emic (i.e., participants) terms.

Naturally, this only pertains to events observed in order to understand and describe the routine, constitutive features of events, scenes, and of the whole program or set of operations under study. When you are interested in the life history of a program or organizational feature, or when you are concerned with documenting a chain of acitivities and their results, you will continue to observe the settings that enable you to do that even if you already understand their organizational structure. Your focus then will be on the "content" of talk, the relationships among events and decisions and activities over time, etc.

Another benchmark you can use for measuring the adequacy of your observation and documentation of observed events is the matrix of dimensions and questions on the next page. This "descriptive question matrix," taken from James P. Spradleys's excellent book, Participant Observation, serves as an especially good tool for checking the comprehensiveness of your description of the entire program or other social endeavor under study. As you ask yourself these questions

Descriptive Question Matrix

	SPACE	OBJECT	ACT	ACTIVITY
SPACE	Can you describe in detail all the *places*?	What are all the ways space is organized by objects?	What are all the ways space is organized by acts?	What are all the ways space is organized by activities?
OBJECT	Where are objects located?	Can you describe in detail all the *objects*?	What are all the ways objects are used in acts?	What are all the ways objects are used in activities?
ACT	Where do acts occur?	How do acts incorporate the use of objects?	Can you describe in detail all the *acts*?	How are acts a part of activities?
ACTIVITY	What are all the places activities occur?	What are all the ways activities incorporate objects?	What are all the ways activities incorporate acts?	Can you describe in detail all the *activities*?
EVENT	What are all the places events occur?	What are all the ways events incorporate objects?	What are all the ways events incorporate acts?	What are all the ways events incorporate activities?
TIME	Where do time periods occur?	What are all the ways time affects objects?	How do acts fall into time periods?	How do activities fall into time periods?
ACTOR	Where do actors place themselves?	What are all the ways actors use objects?	What are all the ways actors use acts?	How are actors involved in activities?
GOAL	Where are goals sought and achieved?	What are all the ways goals involve use of objects?	What are all the ways goals involve acts?	What activities are goal seeking or linked to goals?
FEELING	Where do the various feeling states occur?	What feelings lead to the use of what objects?	What are all the ways feelings affect acts?	What are all the ways feelings affect activities?

EVENT	TIME	ACTOR	GOAL	FEELING
What are all the ways space is organized by events?	What spatial changes occur over time?	What are all the ways space is used by actors?	What are all the ways space is related to goals?	What places are associated with feelings?
What are all the ways that objects are used in events?	How are objects used at different times?	What are all the ways objects are used by actors?	How are objects used in seeking goals?	What are all the ways objects evoke feelings?
How are acts a part of events?	How do acts vary over time?	What are the ways acts are performed by actors?	What are all the ways acts are related to goals?	What are all the ways acts are linked to feelings?
What are all the ways activities are part of events?	How do activities vary at different times?	What are all the ways activities involve actors?	What are all the ways activities involve goals?	How do activities involve feelings?
Can you describe in detail all the *events*?	How do events occur over time? Is there any sequencing?	How do events involve the various actors?	How are events related to goals?	How do events involve feelings?
How do events fall into time periods?	Can you describe in detail all the *time periods*?	When are all the times actors are "on stage"?	How are goals related to time periods?	When are feelings evoked?
How are actors involved in events?	How do actors change over time or at different times?	Can you describe in detail, all the *actors*?	Which actors are linked to which goals?	What are the feelings experienced by actors?
What are all the ways events are linked to goals?	Which goals are scheduled for which times?	How do the various goals affect the various actors?	Can you describe in detail all the goals?	What are all the ways goals evoke feelings?
What are all the ways feelings affect events?	How are feelings related to various time periods?	What are all the ways feelings involve actors?	What are the ways feelings influence goals?	Can you describe in detail all the *feelings*?

about each type of event, activity, or scene you have studied, and about all your observations to date, you will locate areas in which your observation is sufficient.

3. Most often, in doing practical fieldwork from an ethnographic perspective, your inquiry will be constrained by limited resources. In such circumstances, observe each event type as often and in as many of the settings in which it occurs as you possibly can.

A caveat is in order here: in considering how much to observe, also consider the time necessary to write up a legible, comprehensive description in your fieldnotes. (This is usually about one-and-a-half to two times the real time spent on the observation itself.) Also consider the time available for analyzing the data at the end of inquiry and for writing up the report. (If a formal report is to be written, final analysis and writing time will at least equal -- and may in some situations be twice or three times as great as -- the total time spent in on-site inquiry.) These warnings should be taken into account as qualifications of the "more is usually better" advice offered above.

Scheduling Observation

The purpose of ethnographic observation is to understand, describe, and document, and explain naturally occurring social activity. The activity you witness is less likely to be what naturally occurs if you make occasional visits that are scheduled exactly in advance. Participants can concentrate on putting their best foot forward under these circumstances, and many will be inclined to do so. (This is especially true if participants understand that you are coming "to evaluate" them.) On the other hand, surprise

visits can disconcert participants and disrupt normal routines. Participants may feel self-conscious and wary, and they may stumble through activities at which they are otherwise quite adept. Alternatively, they may begin to enact, ad hoc, their vision of the perfect practitioner. In many cases, too, the unexpected arrival of an observer may induce participants to stop what they are doing, conduct introductions, and engage in conversation with the observor -- all from a sense of social obligation, curiosity, or both.

The solution to these difficulties is the following. At the very outset of inquiry, work very hard to negotiate general access to all the environments at the site, or at lease all of the settings that you can conceive of as relevant to your study or evaluation. Gain a general understanding that you'll be visiting them off and on at various times, and that it will help you if everyone simply goes about what they are doing when you appear. Try to spend some time in the early days of your inquiry circulating around the site in order to familiarize everyone with your behavior and remind them that you are, in fact, present. Avoid extensive note-taking on these visits. (If you do take notes, write them immediately after you leave the scene, in some quiet, unoccupied corner.)

Later on, repeat these procedures if you are about to observe frequently in a set of particular places where you have not yet done so, especially if the participants in those settings have seen little of you recently. (For example, you might have an adminstrator announce that you'll be visiting the upper grade classes at various

times in the weeks immediately ahead, then pay some brief visits to those classroom in preparation for actual observation.)

Following these procedures, observe the events and scenes, you need to observe relatively often and, if possible, asystematically. (Don't spend every Monday in Room 8, Tuesday in Room 9, etc.. Don't appear at predictable times.)

In conjunction with the strategies I described in the chapter on entering sites, these steps should acclimate participants to your presence and procedures, demystify your task, obviate their need to recognize your arrival, and make it difficult (or purposeless) for participants to maintain a facade.

RECORDING DATA IN FIELD NOTES

Now that we've discussed observing, some guidelines on taking field notes on what you observe are in order.

1. Take rough notes on what you observe as you observe it.

2. Take rough notes on conversations with participants as you engage in them.

3. When you unexpectedly see or overhear something salient--something germane to the patterns or themes you see evolving in your earlier notes--write it down in rough notes immediately.

4. Fill in rough notes as soon as possible. Much evidence is lost otherwise.

5. Field notes should describe what you observe, hear, etcc., as accurately as possible. BE DESCRIPTIVE--DO NOT CHARACTERIZE OR INTERPRET.

6. Field notes should also include your reactions to, interpretations of, and inferences from particular events observed, artifacts noticed, interviews and formal talks, etc. THESE REACTIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS SHOULD BE PHYSICALLY SEPARATED FROM DESCRIPTIONS. Develop a convention for separating description from interpretation. For instance: (a) Use legal pads and place interpretations in the wide margin. (b) Use the right side of a notebook for description and the left side for interpretations, editorial remarks, etc., or, (c) simply mark off interpretations in brackets, as in the following examples.

7. Field notes should also include on-going syntheses, broader interpretations of evolving hypotheses, what the findings seem to show "now", reflections on discrepancies in the data, etc. These kinds of general analyses should also be separated from description.

8. Be sure to write up field notes and reflections upon them AFTER EACH SITE VISIT AND BEFORE GOING INTO THE FIELD AGAIN. THIS IS CRITICAL. If you fail to do it, you miss issues that need further investigation, fail to focus and refine questions, and end up losing time. You also forget what rough notes mean, forget things you told yourself you'd write down "later". Your study suffers.

9. Plan your on-site time so that you will not have to face field note write-up at the end of an exhausting day in the field. (Fieldwork is exceptionally tiring because you have to work hard to pay close attention.)

Sample Field Notes

The following are some field notes I wrote after an initial visit to one of the schools in an exploratory study. I have deleted details that would reveal the identities of participants. (Regardless of the agreements made about the "publicness" or anonymity of individuals, institutions, communities, etc., FIELD NOTES ARE PRIVATE AND SHOULD BE HANDLED WITH CARE ON SITE AND AFTER THE STUDY HAS BEEN COMPLETED.)

FIELD NOTES
5/5/81 (Based on visit, 9:35-11:10 a.m.)

Today I visited (school) for the first time. (The principal did call me back at 7:30 a.m., as he said he'd do, to tell me it was okay to come.)

Office staff seemed to know about my visit. One secretary was able to say that (principal) had told her I was coming: "Dr. ... Somebody" (Smiled).

Principal (P) asked Assistant Principal (AP) to come in immediately as we entered his office, the door from P's office was open and his desk faced directly into AP's.

P explained to AP that "Dr. Jones" had asked me to come out and "check into rising test scores" -- so it appears established that this is what the study's about--and I always explain it in that way.

P or AP immediately brought up that higher scores mean less Title I funds--they get some 74% of the full per pupil amount. This topic went on for several conversational turns. I simply listened and didn't reinforce it.

P then began to relate something of the history of the school.

(Section deleted)

All this clearly indicates some shared history, some school lore. The principal is new, only here a few months and already he's able to give me a rather extensive history of the school--detailed too. (Several staff members I spoke of in deleted section) are all in mid-30's or early 40's, yet they have been here since 1971 or 1972. This seems to say something about the school--esprit de corps, stability the coordinators mentioned later. Maybe this shared history and lore, even "folk heroes", gives this school a unique sense of identity. If so, that sense may be self-perpetuating. It may be something more recent teachers can hang onto. Need to check this out--ask some of the others, newcomers, why they came, what they heard about when they first arrived, etc.

Anyway, P continued to give me the history. After 1971 there were a succession of principals--one for two week pre-session, one for the first month of school, two in a row for one year each. Then came (former principal) and she stayed for five years, then retired.

It was during her tenure that the scores went up. Also, some "stability" again--although rather relative.

Discussing his own arrival, P said that the teachers "have gone out on their own...created their own programs...work closely with one

another." Laughing a bit, he added that he had to try to find a way to fit in on his arrival. He said this (teachers working closely together, creating own programs) may have something to do with higher scores.

[Would make sense. All the research lit on "ownership" shows this.

The P also said the school has "strong" 5th and 6th grade teachers "in terms of experience".

(Section deleted for brevity; continues after a jump of several paragraphs.)

So, there look to be a number of salient elements.
These seem to be ...

The reading program.

AP and the SI Coordinator pointed out the importance of the "departmentalized" reading program at grade 6--one teacher (name) teaches all 6th grade classes. Spends one hour with each group, which seems like a good bit of time. (Time on task?) Apparently has been this way for several years. (Check it out). Emphasis has been on Development Reading Program with "heavy skills emphasis". This is along with Harper-Row as the "basic series", which I recall they said was used schoolwide. (Check this out). Another program feature is incorporation of reading into all subjects. "Reading in the content areas". This is to "reinforce" (This was pointed out by the AP in the school plan--he found the place right off--referred to again by the SI Coord., repeated by the Reading Coordinator when she came in the room later (didn't hear earlier comments of AP, and SI-C). In summary, then, the reading elements are (1) DRP, (2) reading in content areas, (3) one hour reading periods at grade 6, (4) departmentalized structure.

This is all apparently well-understood, in the forefront of attention--at least for these coordinators. But how salient is it for those who don't arent involved with the school plan?

Furthermore, the lower grades (1-4) are "leveled"--....

(Notes continue for several more pages, identifying further factors in the school setting that my first, two-hour visit, suggested might be salient. At the end of this synthesis and analysis...)

The above SEEM to be some beginning hunches about the school's success--I should say higher scores--based on a little data. BUT IT IS WORTH NOTING THE FOLLOWING:

Item: The reading lady, (name), was surprised to hear (this school was) one of the nine with medians above 50th percentile. She came into the meeting in the AP's office later on--and when I repeated my description of the study purposes, she said: "Our school wasn't one of those...(eyebrows up, pause) WERE we?!" (Nevertheless, there was a clear belief on her part in the worth of what the school is doing.)

Item: These coordinators seemed to have little sense of community change. The poverty ranking is dropping; they mention having more kids from the apartments, but aside from an increasing Hispanic group, they speak of the kids as not "tough". This sure violates the stereotypes. But are the kids really not tough? I need to check out what's been going on in the community lately.

Some other questions to address:

What kind of set-up does 5th grade have?

Need to observe for "reading in the content areas" and check out whether T's say they do it.

Are the scores a real index of achievement? What do T's think?

Do they all use the Harper-Row? (Missing info.)

How long have the teachers been here? Check out "stability."

What are these "strong" teachers doing? (How will I ever see them being "strong"?)

CHAPTER 8

INTERVIEWING

In Chapter 6 I pointed out the functions that interviewing can best serve in practical fieldwork from an ethnographic perspective. Below, I provide some tips on interview design, training, and analysis. As you will see, these are considerations when you are conducting formal interviews using a pre-planned, written interview "schedule" or form. But you should keep these same suggestions in mind as you conduct ad hoc conversations on site.

Framing The Interview

I use the term interview frame to refer to the state of mind or context the interview strives to create for the respondent. The process of designing the interview in order to foreground or emphasize a particular context s what I mean by "framing the interview." (If you re-read what I have to say in Chapter 5 under the sub-headings "Principle #1" and "Principle #2," you can review why giving attention to the interview frame is theoretically important.)

Your primary goal in framing the overall interview should be to formulate questions such that they draw on, and emphasize, the contexts in which participants know and act in their everyday roles in the setting under study.

A few examples will serve to explain what I mean. Let's suppose your inquiry is directed at understanding how teachers use tests. (This was a topic in some research I did some time ago.) Of course you want primarily to observe how teachers use tests, but it can also

be helpful to interview teachers about what they say they do. Now, you can simply ask your teacher-respondents, "Tell me all the types of tests that you have occasion to administer during the school year and tell me what you do with results of each type." The problem with this approach is that teachers rarely have occasion in their naturally occurring circumstances to list out all the tests they give and then to specify what they do with them. For this reason, the question is an inappropriate one from the ethnographic perspective. It foregrounds or emphasizes the interview situation; it creates a structure for thinking about testing and the use of tests that is, for the respondent, only part of this social activity, i.e., being interviewed.

A better approach to framing the interview is to consider when, in the naturally occurring course of classroom and school events, a teacher has occasion to think hard about her/his assessment of a students' achievement. The interview can then be framed primarily in terms of these events. This is the strategy our research group tried. Thus, among the questions we posed were the following:

> (1) Let's suppose that a parent is coming in tomorrow morning for the routine spring conference and has asked you for the usual run-down on how her child is doing. Describe for me in detail what, if anything, you're going to do before that parent arrives in order to tell the parent about their child's achievement.
>
> (2) I know that most teachers in your school usually begin to evaluate their students for grouping on the second or third day of school.
> (a) Now, before that time, do you have any information at all on your new class? (IF so,) what kind of information and where do you get it?

(b) All right. Now let's imagine it's the day or two before the children arrive. You have the information you described available. Has it played any role for you at this point, served any purpose, and if so, what purpose?

We piloted these and similar question formats along with the "straightforward" what-kinds-of-tests-do-you-give-and-how-do-you-use-them frame. The former gave us much richer and fuller information of the kind we were seeking than the latter, which takes the teacher-respondent away from their routine ways of thinking of testing and its uses.

This brief example should communicate the basic principles in framing the overall interview.

Selecting, Wording, And Sequencing Questions

There are a variety of kinds of questions that you will want to pose at one time or another in formal interviews. Knowing and having clear labels for the various common types will help you to be clearer about what kind you want to ask in particular situations. Below, I outline some basic types and also suggest some better and less effective ways of phrasing each.

A. Kinds of Questions

1. Activity/Behavior Questions

Questions about what a person does or has done. Aimed at getting descriptions of things the interviewer would have seen has s/he been present.

Mediocre	Better
'What role do you play on the site council?'	'If I had been present at last week's site council meeting, what would I have seen you doing?'
'Tell me about what your job in the program involves.'	'Let's imagine I'm accompanying you through a typical day on the job. Tell me what I'd see you doing from the time you come in.'

2. Opinion/Value Questions

Questions which elicit people's goals, intentions, desires, perceptions, and values. Questions which tell the interviewer what people think of a program, procedure, etc.

Alternatives

"What do you think about the CTBS test?"

"If you could make any revisions in the CTBS test, what revisions would you make?"

"If it were completely to you, would you continue to give the CTBS in district schools or would you eliminate it--and what would your reasons be?"

3. Feeling Questions

Questions which ask the respondent for his/he emotional response to an issue.

Examples

"When you walk through the classroom door in the morning, how do you feel, emotionally?"

"When you left the in-service, what feelings did you have?"

4. Knowledge Questions

Questions that are asked to find out factual information. The assumption here is that certain things are known--not opinions, beliefs, emotions, points of view.

Examples

"How many students are currently served in your Title I program?"

"How often have you had faculty meetings this year?"

5. Interpretation Questions

Questions asked to ascertain the respondent's understanding, interpretation, or "angle of vision" on a phenomenon known or

believed to be ambiguous, open to multiple interpretations. The purpose is not to "test" the respondent, but to get in touch with his/her poing of view, what s/he believes to be fact.

Mediocre	Better
'What do you think SIP is supposed to be about?'	'If you were to describe SIP to a teacher in another state who had never heard of the program, how would you describe it?'

6. Background/Demographic Questions

Answers to questions of this kind aid the interviewer in knowing where the respondent "fits" in relation to others, what questions s/he can address and which s/he cannot. They help in interpreting a person's remarks by providing context.

Questions of this type often begin an interview: years of experience, education, residence/mobility patterns, roles/jobs currently held, etc.

7. Time Frame Questions

Any of the above kinds of questions can be usefully asked in the present, past, or future tense. Persons can be asked to locate events in time, describe changes over time, and so forth.

TIPS

(a) Memory decays over time. If it is important to find out about changes from one year to the next, through the year, before and after a particular experience, it is preferable to conduct interviews at two (or more) appropriate times. People not only forget, they reinterpret the past in light of the present.

(b) If it becomes necessary to ask abut the past "now", and the goal is to discover the respondent's changes of opinion, feelings, changes in program operations, etc.--then separate the questions about how things were from those about how things are in the interview.

Example

"First, just as background, I'd like you to tell me a little about how you handled the LD students in the past, last year for example. Why don't you just 'walk me through' how your program worked, from the time a referral was made."

(Later in the interview.)

"It would help me to understand some of what you've been saying if you could tell me what steps you take in responding to students with learning disabilities. What's the first thing that happens, the second thing, and so on?"

B. Wording Questions--Some "Rules of Thumb"

Nearly always, the purpose of ethnographic interviewing is to discover the dimensions of perception, feeling, beliefs, and values in which participants (or, simply, the interviewee) are operating. Rarely does an interviewer want only to discover what s/he believes to be fact. Thus, a good ethnographic interview uses questions that minimize the imposition of categories; it avoids limiting responses.

General Rule: ASK OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS--OR AT LEAST ASK THEM FIRST and probe for specifics later.

1. Avoid Yes-No Question

> These enable a reluctant repondent to give minimal answers, and they cause the interviewer to do a lot more work. Interviewers seldom want a yes-no answer; these questions are usually mistakes.

Bad	Better
"Was your sabbatical an important experience for you?"	"Looking back on your year off, what are your thoughts about the experience?"
"Are you using the information the district is providing on student achievement?"	"When the information on student achievement arrives here in your office, what happens next?"
	"And after that?"

2. Avoid Wordings That Imply a Multiple-Choice Response

Bad	Better
"How satisfied are you with the new Title I guidelines?"	"What are your opinions of the new Title I guidelines?"

3. Avoid Presupposition Questions in Most Cases

While there are appropriate uses (below) for questions that assume something to be the case, these kinds of questions are dangerous and should usually be avoided.

Bad	Better
"What kinds of misuse of funds have occured in this program?"	"Sometimes in programs like this funds are misused--guidelines may be unclear, regulations may be unreasonable, people may be careless or irresponsible. I'm wondering whether anything along these lines has occured with this program."
"What kinds of staff conflicts have occurred here?"	"Have you had any staff conflicts--and, if so, please tell me about them."

4. Use Presupposition Questions Carefully

(a) To open up an uncomfortable topic (by suggesting "it happens all the time"), or

(b) When not presupposing will cast doubt on the respondent's competence.

Weak	Stronger
"Do you ever doubt the educational decisions your department chairperson makes?"	"When you find yourself doubting the educational decisions of your chairperson, what kinds of issues does that tend to be on?"
"Have you learned anything about bilingual education since serving as your school's liaison to the county committee?"	"What insights have you gleaned from your year on the bilingual committee?"

5. Avoid Asking Questions That Demand Agreement

Such questions often begin with "wouldn't" or "won't" or take the form of "tag questions"--statements with a question tagged on the end.

Examples

"Wouldn't you prefer release-time for your in-service?"

"You disapprove of the competency tests, don't you?"

6. Use Illustrative Examples Format Or Illustrative Extremes Format To Introduce Difficult Or Sensitive Topics

Questions formatted in these ways help the interviewer establish a neutral stance. Implicitly and/or explicitly, they tell the respondant that "there are many good reasons why x may occur", "there are all sorts of opinions that are legitimate", or "I've heard it all, the good and the bad, so I'm not interested in anything sensational, good or bad."

Examples: "Illustrative Examples" Format

"We hear some teachers say they think far too much testing is going on--that too much time and energy are being devoted to assessing kids. But others say assessment of goals is critical to good education and that not enough assessment is done. And of course, the opinions of other teachers fall everywhere in between. What are your opinions on the amount of testing here?"

"Sometimes in programs like this funds are misused--guidelines are unclear, regulations may be unreasonable, people may be careless or irresponsible. I'm wondering whether anything along these lines has occurred here?"

Examples: "Illustrative Extremes" Format

"We've been talking to lots of kids in different schools and some kids have told me they're loaded all day, you know, to get through school, while some others say they smoke or take a downer at home at night sometimes, but try to stay straight through the day. How about you?"

(NOTE: In using this format, it is important to avoid a leading question, such as...

"We know that most kids do a lot of dope, so we figure you do, too--right? So what do you think about everybody smoking here in school?")

7. Use the Role-Playing or Simulation Format to Increase Specificity

Questions of this type help to cut through the vagueness and generality of some answers, especially those where a behavior or activity requires description in detail.

Examples

"I'm coming here to assume the role of Chapter I Coordinator. Tell me what I need to learn to handle the job effectively?"

"Imagine that I'm following you on your classroom visits to supervise teachers. Describe to me what I see you doing from the time you enter the classroom."

C. Question Clarity--Some Tips

1. Ask Singular Questions

In an effort to get rich information or give the respondent the opportunity to talk at length, interviewers sometimes mix several questions into one. This often leads to information being lost, since the respondent can go on at length about one of the questions and omit (by choice or chance) others. Also, in analyzing the response, it is not always clear wht question the respondent is (or things s/he is) addressing.

Examples

"In order to help those of us managing the program to improve it, we'd like to talk about your opinions of the program. What are its strengths and weaknesses? What do you think is its most useful and important feature? What could be improved and what should stay the same?"

"How well do you know and like those you work with here in the math lab?"

2. Know What Terms are Being Used by Respondents and Use Them

Confusion in interviews often arises when the interviewer is unfamiliar with local terms for things, programs, roles, agencies, etc. Often, too, participants within a single site may use different terms to refer to the same thing. Parents might have their own words for items of educational jargon.

Examples of Local Terms and Jargon

In initial interviews for a CSE project, we discovered that what we know as the California Assessment Program, or "CAP" was in many places known as the "matrix test".

In talking with participants in some schools, the California School Improvement Program was locally known as the "Site Council Program".

In some schools the tests that punctuate the Ginn 720 reading program were known only as "the criterion tests", while in others they were not recognized by that name. Instead, they were called "the Ginn unit tests".

NOTE: Knowing the local terms-in-use contribute not only to clarity, but to rapport during the interview. Using unknown terms can contribute to a feeling of inferiority on the part of the respondent, or help to portray the interviewer as someone "who doesn't know what's going on".

3. If You Can't Learn Local Terminology In Advance, Ask a "Term Free" Question First, Then Follow-Up

Example

"You may have noticed differences between your child's classroom last year and the classroom this year and you may not have. If you have, what differences have you noticed?"

"Okay, you've mentioned several differences. I'd like your opinion now about each one. First, what do you think about _____?"

4. Set Up Signposts To Indicate Where the Interview is Headed and Why It Is Where It Is

Respondents may be confused about why a question is being asked. They may fail to notice innuendos and shifts of a topic. Time and rapport can be lost when the interviewer allows these things to occur. Explicit statements about "where we are" and "where we're going" help respondents follow the questioning and feel competent.

Examples

"Before we move on to the next set of questions, I just want to be sure that I haven't missed anything. You said you had three objectives in working with students in the lab. They were _____, _____, _____. Now, is there anything I missed, any other goals that may have slipped your mind earlier?"

"We've been talking about the School Improvement Program in general up to this point. Now, let's shift gears and look at the program here in your school. What would you tell a teacher from another school about what's been going on here during your planning year?"

D. Sequencing Questions

There are no hard-and-fast rules about sequencing questions in an interview. Some "logical" flow is desirable; you should be able to give sets of questions headings. If you cannot, this may be a clue that better order can be achieved. Following a chronological order, moving from the general to the specific--these are typical organizational strategies that are often helpful.

Below are some personal suggestions.

1. It is often helpful to begin with background data, such as the respondent's job title, years of experience, past positions, classes taught or job responsibilities.

   These are neutral topics. They give the respondent a chance to "ease in" to the situation and feel on solid ground. It is usually best to leave controversial topics for later.

2. If there are specific questions or topics you absolutely must address, begin with a general, open-ended question, then follow up with the specific questions.

   For instance, in CSE's study of the California School Improvement Program (SIP), the State wanted to know about the impact of SIP on several specific features of school organization and life. We wanted to find out about these without pre-suggesting that these were things the SI Program should influence. We developed the following question sequence:

   "Now, I'm interested in the impact of SI on the school during this year when you were just planning. It may have had an impact or it may not--it seems to vary from school to school. What about here?"

   (Several probes: "Anything else you've noticed?")

   "Okay, now let me just follow up on that to be sure I have it. Are there any changes you've notices around the school this year that you'd say SI is responsible for?"

   "How about staff attitudes? If you've noticed any changes in this area, please tell me what they are."

   "What about parent participation?"

3. Sometimes a question can put a respondent on the defensive. This can influence the whole interview. Place these questions with care.

   Example

   In our recent study of testing in schools, we wanted to ask the following question:

   "Could you tell me a bit about the courses in testing or measurement or evaluation that you may have taken in you teacher training or afterwards?"

   We judged that placing this question "up front" with the other background data questions might put the respondent in the position of "revealing ignorance" on a topic s/he could assume we, the interviewers, were expert on. (In fact, many respondents indicated they saw us in that light during the interviews.) Rather than take the chance, we placed this question near the end of the interview form.

Example

In another CSE study, we designed an interview asking district personnel about their job role.

We concluded the "background" section with two questions on education and job experience, asking which pieces of background were most useful to the respondent in his/her job.

The next section began with the questions:

"What factors led to your choosing to apply for your current position?"

"Are you finding that you're happy that you made this job move?"

Then followed a set of questions on what the job entails.

We removed the two questions quoted above. They had the possibility of "setting up" the respondent to describe the job in terms of its good and bad points, rather than simply describing it in terms of its activities and responsibilities.

Piloting The Interview

Piloting an interview means trying it out in a setting or settings similar to those in which it will be used in the actual study. In this short section, I review some reasons for piloting interviews and some procedures for doing so.

A. Purpose of Piloting

1. To discover unintended ambiguities in questions.
2. To discover language unfamiliar to respondents.
3. To assess whether the sequencing leads to smooth flow.
4. To assess whether the interview questions are providing the desired information.
5. To time the interview.

6. To be sure the categories of respondents selected can address the topics they are asked to address.

7. To be sure interviewers understand the purposes of each question and the appropriate question-asking style. (Relates to training.)

B. Procedures for Piloting

1. Select respondents for piloting that are as similar as possible--preferably identical--to the respondents to be interviewed "for real".

2. Be sure to select more than one respondent in each category and pilot with more than one interviewer.

3. Conduct the interview in settings comparable to those in which it will be conducted in the actual study.

4. Tape record each pilot interview.

5. Interviewers should share impressions and listen to tapes as a group after piloting. In group discussion, address the above questions. (See "Purpose of Piloting" above.)

6. Make revisions and re-pilot as necessary, repeating procedures until the group or the project coordinator is satisfied.

7. As a final check, transcribe or otherwise write-up selected interview questions and responses. Once they're on paper, do they still seem to meet the requirements for information?

NOTE: The above assumes more than one interviewer. The same procedures can easily be employed by one person doing his/her own interviewing. It is desirable that this be done because one's immediate impressions of "how it went" often lie.

Conducting An Interview

Basic training in interviewing should be part of your clinical training in ethnography. But before conducting any specific interview, you should be also trained in the delivery of that interview. Even if you have done interviewing before, it is a good idea to brush up on your interviewing skills. Training with a

specific interview is especially important when a group of interviewers will be conducting the same interview: all should deliver the basic questions and probe in similar, if not identical ways.

My suggestions here assume that this training has been accomplished

A. Before the Interview

1. Know the purpose of each question on the interview form and be intimately familiar with the structure of the form.

2. If tape recording, check recorder and tape. Do this before you leave and again on site. Check placement in interview room.

3. If taking notes as a primary data source, have several pencils or pens, plenty of paper.

4. Mark paper and/or tape with respondent identification, site identification, etc.

5. Be on time.

6. Find a quiet place to conduct the conversation, away from others.

7. Explain purpose of the interview, what will happen to the information the respondent offers, guarantees of confidentiality. State how long the interview is likely to last.

8. Answer any brief questions the respondent has.

9. Be at ease. You're not on television.

B. During the Interview

1. Stick as closely as possible to the wording of questions, the agreed-upon probing procedure, the flow of the interview.

2. If the respondent uses terms you don't understand, ask what they mean.

3. Listen carefully. Continue to concentrate. Don't assume you know what's coming next, no matter how many interviews you have done.

4. Appreciate things that are clearly important, of concern, to the respondent. But stay neutral.

5. Be conversational, not interrogatory.

6. Control verbal and non-verbal feedback. Don't lead or evaluate respondent with differential listening, nodding, verbalizations.

7. Take notes on key phrases, key quotations. Your tape recorder may not be working.

8. Control the interview. Re-focus and re-direct respondent as necessary.

9. Thank the respondent for his/her help and credit the value of the information and perspective s/he has offered.
(Note: If respondent seems concerned during the interview, provide neutral reassurances that the information is "useful", "helpful", "clear".)

C. After the Interview

1. If you have been tape recording, check tape immediately. If tape has failed to record, fill in around your rough notes as fully as possible as soon as possible.

2. Be sure you haven't left any notes, other interviews, study material in the interview room. This can lead to violations of confidentiality.

3. Check to be sure interview form, notes, and/or tape are properly labeled.

4. Later, drop the respondent a note of appreciation.

Analyzing Open-Ended Interview Responses

When you do a great deal of interviewing with a common interview schedule or several closely related schedules (e.g., with overlapping

questions), you may want to do a rigorous analysis of the responses in order to consolidate the data. Below, I offer guidelines for how to do this with responses to open-ended interview questions. More closed ended questions (i.e., those which intentionally allow the respondent a rather narrow range of response choices) can also be analyzed in this way. However, categorizing participants' responses to closed-ended questions does not usually require a great deal of effort.

The analysis procedure embodied in the steps below is an inductive one; it moves from particular answers to general categories. The frequency of occurrence (number of responses) of each category can then be tabulated.

Step 1: Select a subset of your interview forms. Depending upon the number of interviews conducted, somewhere between 10% and 25% is a good starting point.

Step 2: Take a given question or set of related questions to work through until coding categories are developed, then move on to another question or set of questions.

Read through all the responses to this question or set in the group of interviews you've pulled out to begin with.

Step 3: List out all the response (or key phrases in the responses), looking them over to see which ones seem similar, seem to "go together".

Step 4: Give names to these categories. These are the starting points for "coding" this question. Coding simply entails labeling each answer as one of a particular "class" or type.

Step 5: See if the categories seem to fit other responses. To do so, choose another 10%-25% of the interviews, look over the same question or set of questions. Do the labels seem to apply? Do they seem to be capturing the sense of what the respondent said?

Step 6: In asking the latter questions, you're deciding whether you need to change labels, divide categories into two, create new categories, eliminate categories. Revise your original scheme

and repeat the process. Use a new group of interviews--at least some new and some old.

Step 7: Strive for fewer categories. It's okay to label 10%-15% or so "Other"--responses which don't fit any of the categories you've chosen. See whether other categories can be combined under a new heading or one of the old ones.

Step 8: Repeat the above proces until others who review your work find it makes good, clear sense without a lot of explanation--and until you feel right about it.

(NOTE that you may have more than one set of "codes" or categories for one response or set of circumstances. For instance, you might have one coding system to characterize the different viewpoints offered, and a second for typifying the reasons offered for those viewpoints. And a respondent may give more than one reason, so that his/her response falls into several categories.)

Step 9: You need to give attention to the issue of inter-rater reliability before you conclude your category system is complete. That is, different coders must be able to agree on what gets coded (is there one reason or three given?) and what codes, or categories, apply.

Give the same two or three interviews, one at a time, to at least two "coders". Ask them to go through and identify the different remarks, phrases, or other units that should be coded, and have them apply what they feel are the appropriate categories to each. (Some training should be given beforehand, complete with examples.)

When the coders have completed their work on all of the two or three interviews, coding the question or subset of questions, calculate the inter-rater reliability. To do so, take:
number of units (utterances, phrases, etc.) coded identically

divided by

number coded identically + number of units coded by Coder A but not Coder B + number of units coded by Coder B but not Coder A + number of units coded by both but coded differently.

The result of this division problem will give you a reliability figure, usually expressed to two decimal points.

The closer the decimal fraction is to 1.00, the higher the reliability.

Reliability figures in the high .80's or .90's are desired.

If you're not obtaining these, further practice, discussion among raters on how to handle particular issues, etc. is one approach. Another is to join into one category the coding categories that are being confused. (Usually, the problem lies in the use of two or three categories that have slightly different meanings, but are close.)

One of these steps should be pursued--both if necessary--until at least two coders can get reliability above .80.

Step 10: In counting up responses by category, be careful not to compare apples and oranges. If two similar but separate questions have been asked of different groups of respondents, it may be better not to lump the responses together in counting.

If responses have come from persons in different positions, roles, etc., the patterns of their answers may be interesting and revealing. (For instance, parents may have given different information than teachers to the same question. This difference is a "finding" you may loose by combining across categories.

Logic and intuition govern how you count and handle the data.

CHAPTER 9

DATA ANALYSIS: SYNTHESIZING AND INTERPRETING

One of the essential skills of ethnographic fieldwork is synthesizing and interpreting data throughout the course of the study. In so doing, the ethnographer's main goal is to recognize emerging themes and patterns in the data. This, of course, is a matter of recognizing "things that go together"--pieces of evidence from within a site and across sites (in studies that are multi-site) that somehow seem related. More specifically, ethnographers seek patterns of co-occurrence among phenomena --patterns which display the functional relationships and meanings of actions and patterns of actions, objects and types of things for one another in terms of participants social realities.

In this chapter, I will first discuss notions of co-occurrence. Then, I'll provide some exercises that will give you an opportunity to look for some patterns in field note data.

Patterns Of Co-occurrence

When phenomena routinely occur together at a particular moment in time and function conjointly, they are described as in vertical co-occurrence. When they recur consistently together in sequence and function in relation to one another, they are said to be in horizontal

co-occurrence. Patterns of vertical and horizontal co-occurrence display the cultural knowledge and practices through which participants organize their lives at a variety of hierarchical levels. Some display the very small or brief contexts that participants recognize, the social meanings particular behaviors have in those contexts, and the rules for selecting and interpreting actions appropriately that are applicable in them. For instance, in a study of face-to-face communication in dyadic counseling interviews, Erickson (1979) found that among White persons a speaker's simultaneous production of a clause terminal juncture, moderately falling intonation, and a glance toward the listener routinely meant "I want to know if you are attending to and following what I am saying." In other words, the vertical co-occurrence of these behaviors meant that the listener was expected to give some listening response "now." This emic social meaning was evident in the routine (horizontal or sequential) co-occurrence of such a response in the form of a vocalized "mmhmm" or "yeah," a head nod, etc. That such forms of behavior as these in fact functioned as listening responses (i.e., meant socially "I'm following what you're saying") was revealed in what the speakers regularly did next (another pattern of horizontal co-occurrence). Recognizing a listening response in the behavior of the listener, speakers routinely went on to the next speaking point. Failing to receive such a response, speakers consistently persisted at their point, reiterating the same idea in progressively simplified and concrete ways until the listener enacted

some form of listening behavior.*

The latter example deals with some very fine-grained bits of social organization that are evident in patterns of behavioral co-occurrence: the situated social meanings of certain behavior forms, the generation of some very brief contexts (kinds of moments in conversation), and some rules for interpreting others' behavior appropriately and selecting appropriate actions oneself. Small patternings such as these, the theory presented in Chapter 4 suggests, are interwoven such that they constitute "larger" or more encompassing social organizational units. Broader, more enduring contexts, for example, are generated and sustained through (and recognizable to the observer in) the patterns of posture and orientation that interactional participants take and hold, as well as in the organization of talk that co-occur with these "positionings." (Dorr-Bremme, 1982; Erickson and Shultz, 1981; McDermott, 1976; Scheflen, 1973) Shifts in these patterns regularly co-occur with one another and with participants' post hoc interpretations of "when the context changed." Even more encompassing co-occurrence patterns display hierarchically higher levels of social organization. An ethnographic inquiry by Mehan (1983), for instance, identified the patterning of the special-education referral process in a school district.

Co-occurrence relationships, as noted, appear in routine behavioral patternings, but they are also sometimes indicated when interactional

* This can seem an obvious or trivial finding until one considers that Black and White participants in Erickson's study employed entirely different sets of rules for signaling listening-response-relevant moments and for indicating listening. As a consequence, White speakers most often ended up explaining points over and over again to Blacks who were in fact listening and understanding, and Blacks in turn felt that Whites were "talking down" to them in demeaning ways.

participants: (a) call for or offer an account of some behavior or set of behaviors, or (b) positively or negatively sanction certain behaviors.

When participants account for or make accountable the absence of some behavior or combination of behaviors, the observor can infer that there is a "rule" for its occurrence in the place where it is missed (Mehan and Wood, 1975:132-134; Schegloff, 1972). This principle is apparent in everyday remarks such as, "I called you; why didn't you answer? Are you mad at me?" Similarly, one program participant asking another something like "Why didn't you assess his psychomotor skills?" can call attention to the rules of normal procedure in "cases such as this one." The evidentiary principle based on accountable absences is merely a corollary of the co-occurrence principle. In unfamilar settings, however, it can often prove useful in calling attention to previously unnoticed rules.

The same is true for participants' positive and negative sanctions. Participants who enact these are telling others in the scene (and the observor as well) what the rules of appropriate procedure are here and now. Classroom scenes are replete with instances of positive and negative sanctions, many of which include explicit formulations of appropriate rules: e.g., "Look up here, please. Now's the time to be listening to me, not talking to your neighbor." Instances are also readily available in routine program interactions: "This is the kind of report that the superintendent wants to see!"; "They sent back our application; we didn't fill in the budget information correctly." Notice that from this point of view what at first appear to be "unsanctioned violations" of the rules can serve to indicate the rules that are actually in use. State law or

administrative mandates may "require" certain budget information, but if the absence of that information passes without notice or negative sanction, that requirement is not a functioning part of the program-as-enacted.

Together with the principle of co-occurrence and the principle of accountable absence, this principle of positive and negative sanctions stands as an evidentiary principle used in constitutive-ethnographic inquiry.

In summary, patterns of co-occurrence are the main evidentiary base of constitutive ethnographic accounts. These patterns are reconizable in the behaviors which routinely "go together" at particular kinds of moments in time and those that routinely follow one another in sequence through time and which are functionally relevant to one another and (thus) to the social event in question and the program as a whole. Once again, the functional relevance proviso is a key one. It differentiates the ethnographer's concept of co-occurrence from the statistician's concept of correlation. The functional relevance of a specific behavior or set of behaviors is apparent interactionally: what happens next when the behavior is present is systematically different than what happens next when it is absent.*

From this perspective, "deviant" or "discrepent" cases --cases that do not fit the pattern apparent in most comparable instances-- are not treated as "unexplained variance" as they are when correlational methods are employed. Rather, as Mehan (1979:105) points out:

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* As an example, consider Erickson's (1979) finding regarding what speakers do next in the presence or absence of a listening response.
the action is absent.

> When action takes place that seems to violate the rules, but participants do not mark the violations, it means the data has not been described adequately.

Apparently discrepant cases, then, are taken as a cause for further inquiry and/or analysis.

Exercises and Examples

It is impossible to simulate the on-site experience here. I cannot provide the plethora of experiential information from which, in the first step, the worker in the site must identify, segregate out, salient pieces of data. I will, however, both (a) illustrate some kinds of evidence and how I fitted them together to identify a theme; and (b) give you an opportunity to practice theme identification. Below are some data I collected and recorded in my field notes during the course of the Title I study I mentioned and used as a source of examples in earlier chapters. Your task is to locate some patterns in the phenomena mentioned in these data. A description of the patterns that I located in these same data appears after each example.

EXERCISE/EXAMPLE #1

- School 1-5/5/81: The SI coordinator tells me that part of the Consolidated Plan includes "emphasis of reading in the content areas".

- School 2-5/12/81: Observing a faculty meeting, I notice that teachers say (in discussion of plans for the organization of reading instruction in final weeks):

  "We're reading in health, we're reading in social studies, we're reading all day."

° School 3-6/9/81: Observing the class of a teacher who taught grade 6 when scores went up, but is now at Grade 5. Everyone seems to be in "obsolete" Bank Street readers. Suddenly the teacher looks up at me as he is moving from one group to another and says: "I alternate it. I don't do the DRP every week. We're just about done with it now, anyway."

Discussion of Exercise/Example #1

Taken collectively, these pieces of evidence suggested to me that each of the schools in the Title I study (elementary schools with higher reading test scores) emphasized reading for comprehension. That is, they gave priority to reading and understanding text as opposed to drill on "decoding" individual letters and combinations of letters. This is evident in teachers' explicit references to "comprehension," as well as in remarks about "reading in the content areas." (In the jargon of elementary-school educators, the latter phrase means giving explicit instructional attention to reading while dealing with subjects such as science, social studies, music, etc. It also can entail using tests in these subjects as "readers," i.e., in place of a basal reading text. Whichever the case, reading of this type inherently emphasized comprehension of the material.) Further evidence of the reading-for-understanding theme appears in remarks about the District Reading Program (DRP). One statement makes it clear that this reading system focuses on decoding (e.g., the letter g in goat). The same quotation, along with other naming the DRP, identifies this approach as (in the speakers' views) too limited: "The DRP won't teach the child to read, because there isn't enough application, continuous reading."

The spontaneously volunteered comments of multiple respondents, along with various "artifactual" evidence (e.g., the presence of

diverse types of reading materials that encourage students to do "continuous reading" for understanding), support the validity of individual teachers' interview claims. That is, respondents agree independently from classroom to classroom and school to school that reading for comprehension has top priority. They do so without being asked in so many words about what has top priority (or if anything does). The notion of reading-for-comprehension is never introduced by the intereviewer. Furthermore, the materials present in the classroom stand out as types that are consonant with this emphasis. Observations (mentioned in only two instances here) also serve to validate interview remarks. (In fact, in a more fully ethnographic study, observation would have been the catalyst in froming themes; interviews, as noted earlier, would have been supplementary.)

A second issue only hinted at here is that of the close monitoring of student performance, as evidenced by the bulletin-board chart in one school's "retrieval room." No other fieldnotes suggest that this close monitoring is patterned across this school or the set of four that were studied. Nevertheless, this is something that, once observed, would be worth exploring for in other settings. Why? A good number of recent studies have suggested that close monitoring of student progress is routinely found in especially effective urban schools. In addition, one can easily imagine ways in which such monitoring could be functionally relevant to students' learning to read. Thus, even if this one piece of data stood out alone in the early stages of inquiry, it would be worth bearing in mind; it suggests a question worth posing across settings on future visits to each site.

EXERCISE/EXAMPLE #2

- School 2-5/7/81: During our first meeting, the principal explains to me that there are "two very good teachers who pound hard on things" at the sixth grade.

- School 2-5/7/81: I observe in the classroom of a 6th grade teacher. He is explaining to students, as I come in the door, their reading assignment for homework. ...later on, he tells me that you have to "generate high expectations" for students.

- School 1-5/19/81: I interview the teacher who does the reading instruction for all the sixth graders. He says, "We have high expectations. We don't say, 'You're going to try to do it.' We say, 'You're going to do it.'"

  Later on, I'm in the same teacher's room after school. He is asking a student about his book report assignment. He tells the student (in a voice I judge as stern) that he has "quite a few more books" he has to read in order to pass. When the student is gone, the teacher explains to me that he requires each "kid" to read 50 books a year "at whatever level he's at--but he's got to read 'em" outside of school. Parents receive notice that the student must read 1/2 hour to one hour a night. Parents also have to sign that books have been read. Students walk to the nearby public library to get books. "But I don't count a magazine. We go there, some of them pick up Ebony or some car magazine and they look at the pictures. I don't let them count that as a book, you know. They have to check out something at their level, and then take it home."

- School 2-6/2/81: Observing in a 3rd grade. Students are reading Ranger Rick, National Geographic, and a variety of other books. A few are taking "mastery" tests. The teacher comments to me briefly: "We do lots of free reading. If I let them, they'd read all day." A few minutes later, a student comes in and asks the teacher "'re we readin?" The teacher doesn't answer, but the student smiles broadly, walks rapidly to a table, and picks up a book. He sits and reads. The entire class is quiet.

- School 3-5/21/81: I am introduced to one of the 6th grade teachers for the first time. My presence is explained by the Title I coordinator. The teacher responds immediately: "Well, I can tell you why we're successful here. We teach. That's all. We teach. We get our hands dirty...in terms of instruction, I mean."

- School 3 (several dates): Every class I have visited to date--and dropped in unexpectedly--has been busy. Students have been working and quiet. The teacher is clearly in control.

- School 4-Observation Notes, Various Dates:

5/28/81--Grade 3: The teacher apologizes to me as I enter, explaining that her aide is not here today...Assignments for each group (by book color) are on board. One group has a peer tutor; she is asking them questions about the story.... The teacher keeps the kids on task by calling a name occasionally, but she rarely needs to do so. The teacher is asking comprehension questions to a group of 4 at the front.... From 8:55 up to 9:11, nearly everyone, all around the room, has been on task....

5/28/81--Grade 5: Children are all around the room engaged in various activities. The teacher tells me that they're taking Ginn mastery tests, but the three in front of me are staring into space...the three boys who have gotten out the "Comprehension Game" are still talking (since 9:45)--haven't opened game. Teacher tells one of the boys with the game that it's his last day to take the mastery test. He nods, goes on with his conversation. Game box stays closed.... Five students at center table are still talking, although reading books are open...I'm walking around the room, one boy on the far left hasn't finished his test. I think he's asleep. ...Lots of noise...Teacher asks me, "Have you ever heard a teacher yell?" She yells for people to get to work...It's six minutes after yell. Most of the noise is still going on, but maybe as many of the group as 75% are sitting with heads facing books now.

5/28/81--Grade 4: (Summary statement written after 20 minutes observation). I've been here since 9:20 and the kids are more "out" than "in". Lots of reprimands; no follow-up. Three children at the far left near the reading machines haven't done anything since I arrived. Most of the T's time with the group has been spent trying to get (girl's name) to put her head down. (She seems to be ill.) The blue group has spent lots of time laughing. Three boys in the yellow book are the only ones who have done much. (Need to ask the teacher about the orange group. Seems lik they're only here because some other T is absent.

6/4/81--Grade 6: Students are directed to do reading assignments on board. They are talking and walking around the room. ...11:08 Boy, E.W., is complemented: "I like the way E--- W---- is working. Girl in blue dress up again. Two boys playing soccer, the table edge kind, with a paper cone; E.W. seems to be only one reading. Two Ss are doing art. ...11:22: E.W.

complemented for third time; two boys who came in late are still talking. Lots of reprimands; no follow-through.

6/2/81--Grade 6: The teacher has been trying since 10:05 to get students to "give ideas" that could go in the essay assignment "What Graduation Means To Me." There are three ideas on the board. No one is paying attention.

6/2/81--Grade 6: I've walked in on a drill assignment. Everyone is seated. The teacher is firing off questions, getting answers: "Shawn, what is an action verb?" Answer. "Shanna, a predicate noun?" Etc. This can't be for my benefit--she didn't know I was coming. Hands go up; everyone is "in" but the students at the back looking out the window and a kid in the third row, left. ...The teacher turns to me and says (as students begin to work): "As you can see, I have no learning centers. I have yet to have it proven to me that two students goofing off at a so-called learning center has anything to do with learning. I am the learning center." ...time for lunch, the students have rushed to put away their materials. All but two finished the entire worksheet. I peek: the answers look pretty good. T uses assertive discipline thing with a marble for moving quietly and "waiting at the tree." It's worth another marble to get to the line of benches outside the cafeteria door. As we walk, the teacher tells me that "the students are so-o-o hyper at the end of the year." I say, "They seemed to get that assignment done, though." T: "This has to do with the expectation level and accountability, after they've been with me for a year. They also know that if they don't finish work, they don't go out for recess."

Discussion of Exercise/Example #2

Before drawing conclusions about issues and themes that are manifested in these pieces of data, you should want to ask some questions. This is because I have intentionally left the information incomplete.

The first five field note entries do suggest that in some schools there are high standards and expectations for student performance. But the data gathered at School 4 do not, on the surface, consistently support this pattern. Indeed, a number of these observations suggest quite the opposite. Students in the grade 4 and grade 5 classes observed on 5/28/81, for instance, are accomplishing little; the

teachers seem unable to maintain their students' engagement in learning tasks. They appear not to hold students routinely accountable for paying attention. On the other hand, the teacher described in the last entry (6/2/81 -- Grade 6) does seem to have high standards both for students' academic performance and their classroom behavior. Furthermore, while the first school 4 entry (5/28/81 -- Grade 3) offers no explicit evidence about standards and expectations, it at least portrays a classroom in which students are busily at work.

In view of this apparently conflicting evidence, you should want to know more about: (1) who the teachers in each observation are -- were they on the faculties of their respective schools during the period when reading test scores rose? (2) when the observations were done -- are there situational circumstances that make some of these data anomalous? You may be able to think of other, similar questions that would, when answered, help these data to fit together. (Recall that posing such questions of information gathered to date is part of on going data analysis in the cycle of ethnographic inquiry.)

As it happens, the data collected at School 4 actually support the hypothesis that high teacher expectations for student performance was a factor in the four elementary schools' markedly higher reading test scores. The teachers at School 4 who seem (in the observations cited) unable to convey such expectations were <u>all new to School 4</u>. They were <u>not</u> present during the years when School 4's reading test scores rose. Furthermore, in evidence I omitted purposefully here, these very teachers volunteered that the "strong" teachers that they had replaced were important in students' accelerated reading achieve-

ment. Others on School 4's faculty explicitly regretted the departure of these "strong" instructors who, it was consistently acknowledged, did have high standards and expectations.

The teachers described in the first and last School 4 entries, by contrast, had been present at the school for many years. Administrators and other faculty members recurrently directed me to their classrooms with the recommendation, "If you want to see how those teachers who have left us ran their classes, go see [the two teachers in question]. They have the kinds of expectations for their students that our former teachers had."

In fact, test scores in reading fell at School 4 with the change in staff. These phenomena may have co-occurred by chance. But that they did co-occur -- taken together with the other data described just above and presented in Exercise/Example #2 -- supports the hunch that strong teachers with high standards and expectations were a factor in these four schools' relatively high reading-test medians.

Notice that this must remain a hunch until further data are gathered. The study only included fieldwork in higher-scoring Title I schools. To examine this hunch, it would be necessary to conduct inquiry in some similar school environments in which students had achieved median scores that were only "average" and low. In these schools, one would seek the routine absence of manifest high expectations for student performance. This would help to support the hypothesis that such expectations were functionally relevant to students' reading achievement. Furthermore, the ethnographic investigator would want to see more clearly how high teacher expectations were

functionally relevant to student achievement. That is, data would be needed to show the specific ways in which those expectations were played out such that they influenced students' learning: e.g., did students in these schools do consistently more classwork and homework? Did they spend more time and effort on assignments? Were they asked to repeat and correct work that was less than excellent? If one simply had in hand only the data that I presented in the example and in my discussion of it, these questions and issues would be targeted for further inquiry during future field visits.

Conducting the Overall Analysis

The final, overall analysis of ethnographic data follows the same principles described and illustrated here. It is simply a last, comprehensive step in the analysis of and reflection on data that recurs throughout ethnographic inquiry.

A usual strategy for sorting ethnographic data for analysis is to develop a set of "codes" -- a theme or issue labels -- for categorizing each section of field notes (e.g., a paragraph, a page, or a "point"). These should be developed inductively in reviewing the accumulated data; many will have emerged already by the time you begin the overall analysis. Each piece of data is then labeled with all appropriate "codes" to indicate the various themes and issues to which it is pertinent. (Many ethnographers duplicate each section of their field notes, cross-filing them under each appropriate theme.)

In the coding or filing process, be sure to code similarly both data that support the presence of a theme, pattern, or issue and those which cast doubt upon or contradict it.

Once all field notes and other forms of data have been appropriately coded and filed, you can begin to build your final account. In so doing, you will want to consider the relationships of function that may obtain between and among what appear at first as separate patterns or themes. There is no need to continue considering each coding theme or issue as distinct and isolated from the others. Indeed, it is often a serious mistake to write separate "stories" about each theme. The richest, more heuristically powerful account is often one that recognizes and points out the systematic relationships among the patterns of phenomena observed.

A final point is appropriate here: Remember that the ethnographer's first goal is to describe social life in ways that maintain contact with the social realities of participants in the endeavor studied. It is <u>their</u> systems of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating, and acting that your analysis should first strive to identify. Once you have located these systems of standards and explained activities in terms of them, you can step back from the data and these <u>emic</u> analyses in order to discuss the findings in <u>etic</u> terms. At this point, you can draw upon "scientific" theories and data from other studies to discuss, as appropriate, the broader implications of your findings.

This brief section treats only some of the most elemental issues in the synthesis and analysis of ethnographic data. For readers who

need actually to do ethnographic data analysis, further reading will be essential. I suggest the following sources as starting points:

McCall, G.J. & Simmons, J.L. Issues in participant observation: A test and reader. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1967.

Pelto, P.J. & Pelto, G.H. Anthropological research: The structure of inquiry. (Second edition) New York: Cambridge Univesity Press, 1978.

Sevigny, M.J. "Triangulated inquiry -- A methodology for the analysis of classroom interaction," in J.L. Green and C. Wallat (eds.), Ethnography and language in educational settings. Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1981.

Spradley, J.P. Participant observation. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1980.

CHAPTER 10

LEAVING THE SITE

Ethnographic fieldwork brings the researcher into closer contact with participants in the research setting than most other modes of inquiry. For that reason, ethnographers typically give some consideration to how their relationship with those they have studied (and often befriended) should be closed. This will seldom be an especially difficult problem for you; you will not have developed close relationships with participants in the studies you are likely to do. The studies will have been relatively brief. (And in any case, if you should become friends with informants in schools that you haven't visited before, you will be close by.)

Suffice it to say that you should:

1. Express your thanks for the assistance informants have given you.

2. Explain where you may be reached after the last data collection visit, whether you plan to return to discuss the findings, whether you plan to do future work in the school, etc.

3. Remind key informants (e.g., the principal, coordinators, etc.) what will happen to the data from here on.

   If you plan to have some informants review the material before you submit it, you should make arrangements for this. Tell them when you expect your draft, when you will need it back, and that while you will certainly discuss their reactions, you cannot promise to change the report.

   If you only plan to make available a copy of the final version of the report, explain when and how you will do so.

CHAPTER 11

REPORTING ETHNOGRAPHIC FINDINGS

The Form of Reporting

As I mentioned in passing earlier, the findings of practical, ethnographic fieldwork need not be presented exclusively as a formal, written final report. The manner of reporting should be negotiated with the primary audiences of the evaluation or study and should take into account: (1) the kinds of information they need; (2) the purposes for which the information will be used; (3) the deadlines by which information of particular kinds is required; as well as, (4) the overall scope of the inquiry. In view of these factors, a series of reports may meet audience requirements better than one, comprehensive statement of results. Some combination of oral feedback and written description and analysis may be called for. In general, however, I recommend that reporting of an ethnographic evaluation or study be done, at least in part, in writing. If a set of periodic reports is required, some (e.g., every other one; summary reports at important milestones in the inquiry) should be written. Alternatively, oral presentations can be accompanied or followed shortly by written summaries. And it is usually preferable to provide a written "final" report encompassing all the findings, even if some oral presentations (or a series of reports, either written or oral) precede it.

My reasons for recommending the inclusion of written reports are several. First and most critically, I find that important data analysis decisions occur during the course of writing. The act of committing oneself to conclusions in print -- conclusions that one needs to support with

quotations, counts of phenomena, etc. -- usually occasions one last, careful review of the data. Is it most accurate to say, "Some of the ...," "Many of the ...," "Most of the ...," or "Nearly all of the ..." ? Which two or three quotations from participants most accurately embody the sense of all participants in a particular category on a particular issue? Which issues, themes, or viewpoints are primary or seminal, and should thus be discussed first or at greatest length? These are some of the kinds of questions one often thinks hard about only as one writes the report -- and they are very much data analysis concerns. If one offers his or her fieldwork findings only in oral form, it is often too easy to gloss over these and similar issues: to speak from one's cumulative "sense" of what the data say, and so more generally and impressionistically than precisely.

Second, the web or network of functional interrelationships among sets of beliefs, ideas, actions and other phenomena is often difficult to describe carefully and comprehensively in an oral format. And even if the fieldworker is able to describe complex interrelationships verbally in these ways, auditors will usually have trouble holding them in mind without some written document to refer to. Third, the full impact of quotations, counts of phenomena, and descriptions of key incidents is often diluted in an oral presentation. Indeed, since time for oral presentations of findings is usually limited, the ethnographer may be forced to omit these and other types of supporting evidence, highlighting instead only generalizations about what was found. This can deprive audiences of the ability to question the validity of conclusions, and it can allow those who disagree with general conclusions to dismiss them. It can also mean that the richness of the data and subtle variations in phenomena are lost in

reporting. Fourth, an exclusively verbal reporting strategy increases the likelihood that findings will be misunderstood. Without a written document to refer to, this can leave the ethnographer in a precarious political position.

Of course, many of these problems and drawbacks can be ameliorated if the ethnographer prepares detailed, written notes prior to making the oral presentation. But once those notes are prepared, it is usually a simple matter to turn them into a document that supplements and elaborates the oral report itself. And, in light of the various points raised above, this is a wise course of action for the ethnographer to take. In summary, I advise that some written reporting should be incorporated into any plan for the presentation of ethnographic results.

With the importance of written reporting established, a word or two about oral reporting is due. First, as the discussion above should suggest, ethnogrqphers should always prepare carefully for oral reporting; and they should avoid the tendency toward simplifying their findings that the usual circumstances of oral reporting can make all too attractive.

Second, when a series of oral reports are planned throughout the course of a study, the ethnographer should be careful to qualify what, at present, is only tentative: a hypothesis or a hunch. This is also advisable, of course, in written reporting; but my experience suggests that the messages such as "This is only a hunch" or "This is an issue we're currently examining" are more easily lost in oral reprts than they are in written ones. Ethnographers more often forget to include them, and the audiences more readily overlook them, in face-to-face interaction.

Third, keep in mind that periodic oral reports need not take the form of a speech or formal presentation. With some preparation, for example, audiences of an ethnographic evaluation or study can learn much by sitting in on the periodic meetings that usually occur when ethnographic inquiry is conducted by a team of researchers. As hunches, questions, and the information-gathered-to-date are exchanged and discussed by members of the inquiry team, the intended consumers of the information can gain an update on the progress of inquiry, as well as a rich sense of the complexity of the issues at hand. In cases where the audiences or consumers of the study are unfamiliar with ethnographic inquiry, however, it is wise to proceed along these lines only with some advance planning. The audience should be informed about the purposes of the team meeting, told what to expect, and reminded that they are witnessing one step of an inquiry-in-process. The roles of the audience and members of the inquiry team should be worked out in advance, and rules should be established; e.g., regarding whether and when the audience can pose questions and/or make suggestions; regarding the use of real names and other identifying details in the team's discussion; regarding the uses that audiences will make of what they see and hear.

All in all, it is best to experiment with this and other innovative forms of oral reporting only in situations where a good deal of trust and understanding exists between the audience(s) and those conducting the inquiry.

Because written reporting is desirable and will in any case most often be required, the following sections of this chapter offer advice on writing ethnographic documents. Many of these suggestions, however, are equally germane to the oral reporting of ethnographic fieldwork findings.

Organizing The Report

Practical fieldwork from an ethnographic perspective is usually undertaken to inform planning or decision making. In most instances, then, it is preferable to organize the report around some set of themes or issues that are simultaneously (1) derived from the inductive process of ethnographic data analysis and (2) responsive to the plans or decisions that the data are intended to inform. As an example, I organized my report of the Title I study -- which examined why a few inner-city schools had markedly higher reading test scores -- by discussing in turn each of the factors that seemed to contribute to those scores. In an evaluation of a state program that funded a year of planning for school improvement, it seemed most appropriate to organize the report around issues of planning dynamics: the negotiation of planning leadership; the role of various constituencies (principal, parents, teachers, and other groups were involved in planning at each school site); the quality of data collection in planning (needs assessment, obtaining information on alternative educational "solutions" to local problems); the degree of integration or cohesiveness in plans; etc. These were issues or themes that suggested themselves in the course of inquiry across thirteen sites and which seemed simultaneously germane to the concerns of state program administrators. Central tendencies across sites and site-to-site variations were discussed under each of these thematic headings.

Using issues or themes as an organizing framework may seem the logical approach to reporting. Often, however, reports of ethnographic inquiry are organized in another way, especially when inquiry is conducted across many sites. This alternative strategy is the case study format.

Here, description and analysis are structured to tell the entire story of each site (or, less often, of settings or organizational groupings within sites) separately. This approach has the advantage of allowing the richly detailed story of each individual locale -- and the story of each one is usually unique in detail -- to emerge with coherence and integrity. The disadvantage of the case study approach to report organization is a practical one. The primary audience of an evaluation or study is usually interested in patterns that obtain across program or organizational settings. They are not interested in wading through separate, mini-ethnographies of each site studied. A single, thematically organized report usually serves their purposes better. Of course, it is possible to provide an overview that summarizes findings across sites along with the site-by-site analysis. But this is merely a redundant effort if no one is actually interested in the stories of each individual site; and such redundancy is a concern in most practical fieldwork, since time and other resources are nearly always in short supply. Thus, the case-study-plus-summary format usually makes sense only: (1) when the information will be used at both a central organizational level and at local sites; (2) when local conditions and activities or site-to-site variations are of primary interest to the audiences of the evaluation or study; or (3) when findings cannot be appropriately organized according to cross-site themes or patterns appear not to be common across sites. If, for the first or second reasons just listed, you do choose a case study approach, it is a good idea to organize each case study around the same themes and headings insofar as possible. This will make cross-site comparison easier. A cross-site summary should also be provided. In writing it, don't neglect to include some illustrative,

supporting data. Many readers will examine only the summary; it should not be filled exclusively with unsubstantiated generalization.

Occasionally, a chronological organization will be appropriate in reporting ethnographic findings. This strategy is most useful when recounting the natural history of some innovation or change. It can also facilitate an audience's understanding of events that recur in the same order time after time, for example, in a daily, monthly, or annual cycle. Select this approach with care: simply because events routinely occur in some chronological cycle does not mean a report should be organized chronologically. Generally, it is best to use chronology as a supra-ordinate organizational framework only when decision makers are (or should be) interested in the temporal ordering of events. Remember that you can always describe the genesis and evolution of "what is going on" within a thematic chapter or section.

Showing Evidence

As I have previously explained, evidence in ethnographic inquiry focuses on observed patterns of co-occurrence. The frequencies with which phenomena occur and co-occur, therefore, constitute key bits of evidence.

The occurrence of phenomena can be summarized by frequency counts indicating how often activities, ideas, beliefs, etc., were observed or mentioned within a given period of time. Co-occurrence can be displayed in simple contingency tables. But when counts and other simple quantitative measures are used, they should be supplemented by illustrative examples of the phenomena counted. This can be done with description, quotations, and

other prose devices. Numbers are not out of place in ethnographic reporting, but they should be used primarily to summarize and supplement thick description and narrative analysis of how phenomena function within participants' systems of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating, and acting.

Descriptions of events and quotations of participants' words will constitute the greater part of the evidence in ethnographic reporting. In choosing to include either, select those that are "representative" or exemplary of some category or class. Avoid including those that are merely witty or sensational.

It is important, too, to introduce and/or follow quotations and descriptive pieces with contextualizing remarks. Your reader should clearly understand the generalizations or points that the bits of evidence cited are intended to substantiate. They also deserve to know where and when the statements quoted or activity described occurred. Bits of description should be preceded with some "scene setting" that indicates the location, social purposes, and personnel engaged in the activity described, as well as what occurred just before and just after the episode you have chosen to describe.

In quoting, it is important to tell whether the remarks cited were volunteered, offered in elaboration to a question-response, or given as an answer to a direct question. (The more unconstrained and "spontaneous" the comment, the more weight it is likely to carry.) Usually, it is a good idea to explain the circumstances in which the statement was made, and to quote or paraphrase any question that may have elicited it.

Many beginners wonder how to format descriptive evidence so that it stands out distinctly as "a datum." One way is to introduce the piece with some consistent cue, such as the words Field Note or simply Note, with some indication of the date and location, e.g., Field Note (Carson School, Faculty Meeting, 9/15/84): ... . I often single space and indent descriptive pieces to set them off, using an introduction such as the previous one to distinguish description from quotations.

Another point is important here: be careful to preserve the anonymity and confidentiality of settings and individuals in reporting data -- unless, of course, none has been promised. In most cases, you will want to name at least the relevant organizational role of the individual quoted, but do so in general terms when a specific role name can lead to the respondent's identification. For instance, use "an administrator at Carson School" or "one principal in a school studied" rather than "the principal of Carson School." Even if "Carson" is a pseudonym, persons familiar with the schools discussed may be able to glean enough details from throughout the report to identify its true name. Using phrases such as those suggested above provides extra protection for the respondent. Changing sex-specific pronouns (e.g., using he for she and vice versa) also gives added protection to individuals.

Pseudonyms are recommended for persons, institutions, and organizational entities that are discussed throughout a report. Identifying them with letters or numbers (Hospital A; Clinic 2) is an option, but I have found that readers lose track of which setting is which in long reports that use this form of identification. You will want readers to associate findings with particular settings as they proceed through your account; pseudonyms seem to facilitate their doing so.

It may also be necessary to disguise or even omit details that can lead to the identification of individuals, organizational units, or settings. The names of well known local activities and things (landmarks, newspapers, etc.) should be avoided; descriptions of them should be sanitized or (if that is impossible) omitted.

Finally, in summoning evidence in support of a conclusion or generalization, it is best to show how data of different types "triangulates" to substantiate your point. For example, you should draw together observations of naturally occurring activity, remarks by respondents in different roles, and artifactual evidence (from documents, and other material objects), indicating how evidence of each kind independently supports -- and how all together converges upon -- your conclusion. By the same token it can help authenticate your findings to demonstrate that persons who one would normally expect (or might expect) to disagree on something (e.g., because of their respective roles, frames of reference, other stated beliefs, etc.) in fact concur in this matter you are addressing.

Qualities of Good Ethnographic Writing

Two analogies often help beginners at ethnography conceptualize the qualities of good ethnographic writing. One is the analogy to film editing. In making a film, much more footage is taken than is actually used in the final version of the film. The task in editing is to assemble pieces of all that footage together in such a way as to communicate a story. How the footage is arranged makes a great deal of difference in the

final story and how the viewer receives it. The camera angles that are chosen, how they are sequenced, the length of time each shot appears on the screen, the lighting and background, and so on all communicate a message to the audience.

Much the same is true in ethnographic writing. How much time (or page-space) is spent on each issue conveys a message about which issue(s) are most important. The overall sequencing of themes and issues, as well as the immediate juxtaposition of quotation and bits of description, carry implicit messages about their relative significance and authenticity and about their relationships with one another. Subtle differences in word choice can make for big differences in the tone of the account, in whether it appears as generally positive and supportive or negative and condemnatory, for example. In short, each decision that the ethnographic writer makes, as does the film editor, influences the message of the story. All this bears holding in mind as you write an ethnographic account.

From another perspective, writing an ethnographic report is in some way analogous to constructing a building, especially in contemporary architectural terms. Each piece of the account should have some function or purpose; together, each piece should contribute to the overall structure. This analogy makes the point that extraneous material should be omitted. Beginners, in particular, have a tendency to include seemingly random "noticings" in their report. I recently read the work of a neophyte fieldworker who had been asked, with minimal training, to write an "ethnographic case study" of a school desegregation program. His account was filled with descriptions of things that found a place on his report merely because he found them striking. One section, for example, was devoted to a detailed

description of the "well-kept physical plant" of the schools visited. If this was in some way relevant to the desegregation effort, the connection was never drawn. This kind of reporting is typical of many beginners at ethnography, even those who have received considerable training. It is to be avoided, since it obscures the principal findings of the study and consumes the reader's time to no purpose. The analogy of ethnographic writing as architectural construction, then, serves as a reminder that each part of an ethnographic account should stand in a mutually supportive, systemic relationship to each other part.

One last reminder about the emic-etic distinction is appropriate here. Good ethnographic writing should (as should the analysis that underlies it) maintain contact with the social realities and systems of meaning that participants in the setting(s) studied know and experience. The written report should show how, in terms of those realities and meaning systems, the activities observed are routinely organized as they are. It is perfectly acceptable (and in most practical studies desirable), once this is done, for the writer to step back from this emic viewpoint in order to offer an etic (or outsider's "scientific") perspective on the findings. At this stage, social science theory and research can be used to explicate the results of the inquiry in broader, comparative terms. It is incumbent upon the writer to clarify throughout the report when he/she is discussing matters from an emic (i.e., participants') perspective and when he/she is examining them from an etic viewpoint.

These few suggestions, as is the case with those throughout this volume, are only introductory. Ethnographic writing like ethnographic

inquiry itself is part art, part science. Your skill in ethnographic writing will grow as you read diverse types of ethnographies with an eye toward how they are written, and as you practice ethnographic writing.

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